

John Raleigh Nay
Ambassador Designate to Suriname
Statement Before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 15, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear before you today. I am grateful for the confidence the Secretary has placed in me, and am deeply honored by the President's nomination to serve as United States Ambassador to the Republic of Suriname.

I am also very pleased that my wife Judy can join me here today. She has helped me throughout my career, and deserves praise for all her work on behalf of the United States.

I have been privileged to serve the United States as a Foreign Service Officer since March 1977. Having been born in Louisiana in the 1950s and then having lived in several states before growing up in Michigan, as well as having visited all 50 states, I have had the opportunity to see how our country has grown as a society. We have moved from being a country that treated millions of its citizens unequally – with slavery and Jim Crow laws leaving a sad legacy not yet fully overcome – to being a country that serves as an example to most of the world, even as we still work to meet challenges. While representing the United States abroad in such diverse places as India, South Africa, Canada, Taiwan, Singapore, and then most recently in Canada again as Consul General in Toronto, one of our largest consulates, I have drawn on my experiences to encourage

people to see that working together helps make progress possible. That while one cannot immediately change the legacy of centuries, a commitment to human rights and decency and working together by all sectors of society without regard to ethnicity or religion can help a society in its efforts to overcome legacies of the past.

If confirmed, I look forward to representing the United States in Suriname – one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse countries anywhere. The ancestors of Suriname’s people hail from the regions where I have served – Africa, India, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the West. The religious communities there also represent much of the world – Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and the oldest continuous Jewish community in the Americas. I hope to work with the people of each of these groups and religions, as our Embassy represents the highest ideals of our country.

My first priority would be protecting the safety and welfare of Americans in Suriname – both private citizens and the official community, including our Peace Corps Volunteers who do great work on behalf of the United States in Suriname, and in so many countries.

I also plan to work to strengthen democracy and transparency in government. Suriname has made real progress in the 17 years since the re-establishment of civilian rule, and national elections are scheduled to take place next year. It is very much in the United States’ interest that Suriname be a stable democratic partner, and if granted the opportunity to serve there, one of my highest priorities will be to work toward that goal.

The United States, Suriname, and other nations in the region also have a vital interest in ensuring the rule of law. People cannot feel secure if they do not have a legal system they can count on. Close cooperation between duly constituted law enforcement in both countries, and strengthened law enforcement capabilities, are an important part of that. Suriname has made progress in its battle to stop trafficking in persons, arms, and narcotics. Suriname also recently hosted the first technical meeting of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) – a multi-year, multi-faceted, complementary initiative to the Merida Initiative in Central America and Mexico. CBSI is another pillar of our broader hemispheric citizen safety strategy, as noted by President Obama in April during the Summit of the Americas, where he announced an initial investment of \$45 million toward CBSI. Suriname will remain a key partner for the United States in our efforts to promote citizen security in the Caribbean region.

The Administration is working to protect our environment and to combat the dangers posed by pollution and the risks of climate change. An important part of that effort is working cooperatively with other countries around the world. Some of the people of Suriname, heirs to a wonderful rain forest and other natural areas, see the benefits of eco-tourism as one way to demonstrate that these environments are worth protecting from destruction by clear-cutting or illegal logging or mining. If confirmed, I will work hard to help protect Suriname's wonderful natural environment, a goal that I firmly believe is in both the interest of the United States and of the people of Suriname.

Suriname is a land of significant natural resources, from bauxite and gold to untapped petroleum reserves. Free trade is a key part of the economic engine that helps drives progress and growth, and it is in our interest to increase our trade and economic ties with Suriname.

If confirmed, I look forward to representing the United States in Suriname, working with you and your colleagues in Congress on behalf of the Administration, while also working closely with the Government and the people of Suriname in a genuine spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.