

Testimony of Matthew W. Barzun,
Ambassador-Designate to the
Kingdom of Sweden,
Before the
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

July 28, 2009

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Sweden. I thank President Obama and Secretary Clinton for placing their confidence in me through this nomination, and thank you for considering it. If confirmed, I will strive each day to live up to this responsibility of public service.

Part of what makes me confident in my ability to serve is the knowledge that I will not be in this alone. My wife of 10 years, Brooke, is here today and I would like to take this opportunity to introduce her. Should I be confirmed, she (along with our three young children, Jacques, Eleanor, and Charles) looks forward to the opportunity of helping me represent our country in Sweden.

The journey that brings me here today began twenty years ago this summer, in this city, in this very building. I had just completed my freshman year at Harvard, and traveled from my home state of Massachusetts to Washington to work as a summer intern for the then

freshman Senator John Kerry. Most of my days that summer were spent reading constituent mail. And while at first we interns all sought more high-profile assignments -- or at least the chance to pass the Senator a note during a hearing such as this -- Senator Kerry made it clear to us that this daily practice of listening was hard work and meaningful work.

After graduating with a degree in History & Literature of America in 1993, I headed to the West coast with a four-person start-up called CNET Networks, which was one of the first internet media companies. Within a few years, internet growth exploded, and CNET was seen as a leader in the industry. Last year, it was sold to CBS, having grown to roughly 2,000 employees.

In the early days of CNET, our biggest competitors were the computer magazines. They had lots of talented editors, managers, and salespeople, but we had one key advantage: we could actually listen in real time to what customers wanted. Rather than simply list a few letters to the editor, as the magazines did, we could enable users to provide real-time feedback. Providing tools they needed to communicate with us, and then listening to that feedback, made a dramatic difference. When my wife and I decided to move to her hometown of Louisville, KY to start a family, I brought these lessons with me and soon became deeply involved with civic work in that vibrant community.

Whether as a business executive or as a civic volunteer; whether on the East Coast, West Coast, or right in the middle of this country, I have continually sought new ways to get more perspectives on recurring difficulties and thus develop new solutions to old problems. Such skills and experience are what I believe would enable me, if confirmed, to be an effective representative of, and advocate for, the United States of America as Ambassador to the Kingdom of Sweden.

Today's challenges cannot be solved by any **one** nation; and the U.S. could not ask for a better partner than Sweden in addressing these challenges, given its position as a highly engaged, principled, generous, and effective player on the world stage with nearly unrivalled diplomatic outreach. This partnership will prove even more critical for the remainder of this year, during Sweden's Presidency of the European Union. Sweden not only shares our priorities, but also the risk. For example, Sweden is working alongside us in Afghanistan and leading a Provincial Reconstruction team there.

We also share a common interest in developing alternative, more efficient sources of energy and clean technologies. Former Ambassador Wood and our excellent team at Embassy Stockholm helped promote U.S.-Swedish alternative energy partnerships with an initiative they called the "One Big Thing." This effort was tremendously successful and, if confirmed, I plan to build upon this effort. Clearly, there is much that we can do -- not just One Thing, but many -- working together with a trusted, innovative partner like Sweden.

So as I sit before you today, I am reminded not only of my experience as an intern 20 years ago but also of my experience six months ago, when I was honored to join so many other Americans at President Obama's inauguration on that cold, clear day last January. As it did for many, that experience inspired me. As you may remember, President Obama called each of us to service and asked for "a new era of responsibility." Specifically he said that we each as citizens have "*duties to ourselves, to our nation, and to the world; duties that we do not accept grudgingly but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult challenge.*" Our brave men and women serving overseas do precisely that. The team at our Embassy in Stockholm do that each day; and, if confirmed, I too will seize that duty gladly and will join them and join you in giving it my all.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.