

Opening Statement
Richard R. Verma
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs
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Madame Chairwoman, Senator Wicker, and members of the Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today. This is a great honor for me, but also a somewhat unusual experience, as I am more comfortable and accustomed to sitting in the staff chairs behind you rather than at the witness table. In many ways I still consider myself a congressional staffer and, if confirmed, I will certainly take that mindset into the job. Let me also thank the President and Secretary Clinton for nominating me and asking me to serve in this position. I was humbled to have been asked, and you have my commitment that I will work very hard to live up to the high standards and expectations that the Administration and this Committee have set.

As the Secretary said during her confirmation hearing, these are historic times with huge global challenges before us. From terrorism to climate change to poverty and disease to the international financial turmoil and ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan -- the foreign policy and security challenges facing this country loom large. Combating these challenges will require the full arsenal of U.S. power -- "Smart Power" -- as the Secretary and others call it, and the State Department will be a major player in these efforts.

This will require the Department to play an increasingly larger and more demanding role in its diplomatic and development efforts around the globe. Clearly, these increased roles, missions and budgetary needs must be coordinated with and ultimately supported by the Congress if we are to achieve true success. I can commit to you that I will do everything I can to make this a true partnership between the Committees of jurisdiction and the Department as policies are debated and formulated, and additional resources are secured.

As you know, the job of Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs is not a policy job. It is in large measure, a liaison job – a place to facilitate the exchange of information between the executive and legislative branches. It is the bureau that helps the Congress and the State Department carry out its shared constitutional responsibilities in the oversight and execution of U.S. foreign policy. My default position will be to share information with you, to consult widely, to be as responsive to your needs as possible, and to be non-partisan in the way in which we approach our mission. From facilitating an exchange of ideas on major foreign policy issues to helping a constituent with a lost passport, you can count on the Bureau of Legislative Affairs as a place you can turn to for help. Given that the Secretary is a former Senator and I am a former staffer, I can assure you that our relationship with Congress is of paramount importance and we know that only with timely and accurate information can you do your jobs effectively. I am committed to providing you with that information.

In closing, I want to again thank the President and Secretary Clinton for their confidence. Let me also thank my mother and father, and my entire family for the support they have provided to me. My father has the somewhat classic immigrant story, arriving from India in New York City in 1963, with only a bus ticket and \$24 dollars in his wallet. No other resources, support systems or networks in place. He would go on to earn his masters, PhD, become a full professor and he and my mom would raise five kids in their new home country. I know I am only here today because of the efforts of my family and so many friends and mentors along the way who gave me a chance and allowed me to stand on their shoulders. If confirmed, I will not let them down.

Thank you again for the time and opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to answering your questions.