

Statement of Michael C. Polt  
Ambassador-designate to the Republic of Estonia  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
October 8, 2009

Madam Chair, Senator DeMint, Members of the Committee,

I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next U.S.

Ambassador to the Republic of Estonia. I am deeply grateful to the President and to Secretary Clinton for the confidence and trust they have placed in me. If confirmed, I will uphold that trust by advancing America's interests in Estonia, deepening our already strong partnership, and providing protection for American citizens who travel and live in Estonia. I also commit myself to work closely with this Committee, your staff, and your Congressional colleagues.

Together with my wife, Hallie, our daughter Lindsay, our son Nicholas, and my sister, who is currently serving in the Foreign Service at our Embassy in Ankara, the Polt family is once again excited about the prospect of reporting for one of the most welcome duty assignments for any American – serving this great nation as its representatives abroad. While only Hallie and I will actually be moving to Estonia if I am confirmed, our family, over more than 30 years of diplomatic life, has learned to be together even when we are apart.

For an even longer time, over fifty years, successive U.S. Administrations refused to acknowledge the Soviet Union's illegal and forcible occupation of Estonia. The regular statements of support that came from the United States served as a beacon of hope for Estonians caught behind the Iron Curtain. Since 1991 and the reestablishment of Estonia's independence, each American President and every Congress

have provided generously in assistance and in expertise so that Estonia could transform itself from Soviet satellite to Baltic tiger.

Estonia is now a modern, democratic, free-market success story. And Estonia is passing on the benefits of its success. Even before it became a NATO Ally in 2004, Estonia never hesitated to join us in sending its sons and daughters into harm's way – be it in Afghanistan or Iraq -- in support of our shared objectives. Today, Estonian troops operate without caveats in southern Afghanistan. With more than 13 percent of its armed forces deployed abroad in NATO operations, Estonia has one of the highest deployment percentages in the Alliance. It has paid a high price for this service, as demonstrated in August when two Estonian soldiers were killed in an IED attack in Helmand.

Estonia's military remains a force in transition, and our military financing and training support remains a crucial tool to help create a military fully capable of serving alongside U.S. forces.

Estonia has seen a severe fall in its GDP this year as a consequence of the global economic downturn. If confirmed, I will work closely with U.S. and Estonian businesses to promote trade and help create jobs in both our countries. Despite its own economic problems, Estonia continues to provide both economic and technical expertise to countries struggling to achieve democracy and prosperity, including Afghanistan, Georgia and Belarus.

Estonia is also doing extraordinary things in information technology, and is eager to share and develop together with us new innovations to deter cyber crime, protect digital property and provide e-government solutions. Among the first nations to become the victim of orchestrated attacks on its digital networks in 2007, Estonia's Cooperative Cyber Defense Center is now a NATO Center of

Excellence, bringing together cyber experts from Allied countries to strengthen our cyber defenses. If confirmed, I will work to contribute American know-how on cyber defense to this important endeavor, and reach out to American businesses to foster public-private partnerships that complement progress in cyber space on the commercial front as well.

I would also support Estonia's commitment to finding solutions to its energy, health and social challenges. While Estonia is a net exporter of electricity due to its large oil shale reserves, oil shale is a highly polluting form of energy. Estonia is taking a proactive approach to its energy needs, while not losing sight of the fact that energy security requires both diversity of supply and clean energy. Our Embassy in Tallinn is helping the Estonians to explore clean energy options – and I am ready to build on this effort.

The Government of Estonia has recognized the threat of its growing HIV/AIDS rate, and is taking steps to spread knowledge about prevention and expand access to testing. If confirmed, I will encourage the Government of Estonia to do more, as well as seek ways that the United States can assist, such as by initiating HIV testing for the Estonian military.

The United States welcomes Estonia's ongoing efforts to build strong communal relations among all Estonians, including the country's sizeable Russian-speaking population. If confirmed, I intend to work closely with my public diplomacy colleagues in Washington and in the region to further utilize "new media" resources to better reach out to all Estonians, and especially Estonia's Russian-speaking youth.

Madam Chair, members of the Committee, the history of relations between the American people and Estonians is one of trust and mutual support. Just as we kept the faith with Estonia during a difficult

past, Estonians today are at our side as we meet common challenges and seize joint opportunities. If confirmed, I will dedicate myself to advancing America's interests in Estonia and to furthering our partnership.

Thank you again for allowing me to appear before you today. I look forward to your questions.

