

Statement by Ms. Caroline Kennedy
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Japan
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 19, 2013

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker, and Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you this morning as the President's nominee to serve as United States Ambassador to Japan. I appreciate the confidence that President Obama and Secretary Kerry have shown in nominating me for this important position, and I am grateful for the consideration of this distinguished Committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today; to answer your questions and hear first-hand your thoughts and concerns about our essential relationship with Japan. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Committee and with other Members of Congress to advance the interests of the United States, protect the safety of our citizens, and strengthen the bilateral relationship for the benefit of both our countries.

I would also like to thank my family for their support throughout this process, and their enthusiasm for this mission. My husband Ed is here along with two of my three children, my daughter Tatiana and my son Jack. I am so pleased that my aunt Vicki is here as well. She carries with her every day the spirit of my uncle Teddy whose devotion to this institution, to his colleagues and country, was an inspiration to all of us.

I am humbled to be following in the footsteps of some of Congress' most distinguished members – Mike Mansfield, Walter Mondale, Tom Foley, and Howard Baker. If confirmed, I will try every day to live up to the standard they set in representing the United States and advancing our relationship with Japan. I am also grateful to Ambassador Tom Schieffer and especially to Ambassador John Roos and Susie Roos for their generous advice and wisdom.

I would also like to acknowledge Ambassador Sasae from the Embassy of Japan, who is himself a distinguished diplomat and who has been a steadfast friend of the United States.

I can think of no greater honor than to represent my country abroad. I have spent my career working to make American history and ideals accessible to the widest possible audience, and in particular, to younger generations. As President of the Kennedy Library, I am proud that my father became the first “digital” President, when we made his papers available online around the world. As Chair of Harvard’s Institute of Politics, I have worked to train new generations of leaders to pursue careers in public service and to expand international opportunities for students.

In my books on the Bill of Rights and the Right to Privacy, I sought to engage young audiences in the debate over our fundamental rights and to give them the tools and understanding to advance and defend our liberties.

For the past ten years I have been working with the New York City public schools on education reform efforts. In a school system where students speak more than 130 languages, I worked to increase individual literacy, cultural awareness, college access, arts education and international exchange programs. I saw the power of public-private partnerships to leverage involvement and results, and, if confirmed, I look forward to building upon those experiences to strengthen the ties between young people in Japan and the United States.

And finally, this appointment has a special significance as we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of my father’s Presidency. I am conscious of my responsibility to uphold the ideals he represented – a deep commitment to public service, a more just America and a more peaceful world. As a World War II veteran who served in the Pacific, he had hoped to be the first sitting President to make a state visit to Japan. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would be humbled to carry forward his legacy in a small way and represent the powerful bonds that unite our two democratic societies.

I can think of no country in which I would rather serve than Japan. I first visited in 1978 with my Uncle, Senator Kennedy, and was deeply affected by our visit to Hiroshima. Our countries are bound by deep political, economic, cultural and strategic ties, and our partnership has a global reach. We share a commitment to freedom, human rights, and the rule of law. Japan is the world's third largest economy, our fourth largest trading partner, and the second largest source of foreign direct investment in the United States.

Japan is home to 50,000 U.S. troops, the U.S. 7th Fleet, and 170,000 American citizens. As the United States rebalances toward Asia, our alliance with Japan remains the cornerstone of peace, stability, and prosperity in the region, as it has been for more than 50 years. If confirmed, I will work closely with the leadership in the U.S. military to further strengthen our bilateral security relationship.

At the same time, Japan is an indispensable partner in promoting democracy and economic development in the region, as well as in global humanitarian efforts and peacekeeping. These are areas I care deeply about, and, if confirmed, I will work to further strengthen this critical partnership at a vital moment in its history.

This is indeed an important moment in the history of U.S. – Japan relations. Japan is enjoying a period of political stability and economic renewal and is eager to increase trade and investment with the United States. If confirmed, I look forward to working with American business to promote American exports, expand trade and support initiatives such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

In addition, I will work to increase exchanges between American and Japanese students, scholars, and citizens so that future generations will understand our shared history and continue to bind our two nations even closer.

Finally, if confirmed, I will meet my most fundamental responsibility: to promote and protect the welfare of all American citizens in Japan. This includes providing a safe and secure environment for U.S. government employees and their families.

I especially look forward to benefitting from the support of the talented Foreign Service professionals, both American and locally engaged staff, at our Mission in Japan.

I would like to thank this Committee for your consideration of my nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with you to advance our national interests, protect our citizens, and deepen our ties with Japan.