

Statement of Joseph Cella
Nominee, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Fiji,
the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga, and Tuvalu
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
May 9, 2018

Good morning, Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, and Distinguished Members of the Committee.

It is a joy and a high honor to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to serve as the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Fiji, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga, and the independent island nation of Tuvalu.

I want to express my gratitude to President Trump for his confidence in me and for the opportunity, with your consent, to serve and represent the United States of America in what is a crucial point in history with our long-standing Indo-Pacific partners.

I also want to express my gratitude to Vice President Pence for his support of my nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Secretary of State Pompeo and his seasoned team of State Department professionals, particularly those at Mission Fiji, and those at various other federal agencies whose missions engage the island nations. If confirmed, I will uphold the trust of the American people, and faithfully discharge the responsibilities that are vested in this Constitutional office.

Should I be confirmed, I anticipate working in conjunction with Prime Minister Bainimarama of Fiji; President Mamau of Kiribati; President Waqa of Nauru; His Majesty King Tupou VI and Prime Minister Pohiva of Tonga; and President Sopoaga of Tuvalu; and with the members of their respective governments.

My family is integral to who I am, and all that I do, and I would like to take a moment to thank them - especially my wife, Kristen, and my children, Francesca, John Paul, Dominic, Rita Rose, Mariana, and Anthony. Their beautiful, selfless love and support has sustained me in all that I have done. And they are ALL ready to serve as public diplomats in their own unique ways. They are learning, early on, the vital connection of service and citizenship in our great republic.

I would like to acknowledge my mother, Janice Cella, who is with us today, for her love, prayers and indefatigable support. I would also like to acknowledge my late grandfather, Joseph Z. Cella, and my late father, Robert F. Cella, who are with us in spirit. And just as they proudly and honorably served our nation in wearing the military uniform during World War I and the Korean War, if confirmed, I look forward to serving our nation in the diplomatic corps.

One of our Founding Fathers, and United States Ambassador, Benjamin Franklin, described the characteristics of a diplomat as follows: "The qualities of a diplomat are sleepless tact, unmovable calmness, and a patience that no folly, no provocation, no blunders, may shake."

My faith, family life, education, and nearly 25 years of professional experience in both the private and public sectors, world travels, and as a founder and leader of multiple organizations, in varied environments, have shaped these characteristics and skills, and are critical factors, preparing me to ably serve.

The name of my small company is "The Pontifex Group", with "Pontifex" taken from the Latin "pons" and "fec", which means "bridge-builder". The nature of a diplomat is one of a bridge-builder. The diplomat either builds new bridges, maintains existing bridges, or fortifies those bridges in need of greater support. Serving as a bridge-builder has been my nature since boyhood and has been a gift that I have employed as a husband, father, working in the United States Senate and House of Representatives, as a businessman, confidant, and friend. Should I be confirmed, I will serve as our nation's bridge-builder to the five island nations, to the team at post, and all with whom I encounter.

The island nations are an increasingly important component for the strength of our commitment, presence and relations in the Indo-Pacific; for its free and open nature, sustaining democratic principles, the rule of law, and market-based economies. It is imperative we lead, side by side with our allies committed to the region, including Australia, Japan, and others, in order that a void not develop and be filled by others who may not share our shared commitment to the preservation of human freedom and respect for democratic principles.

If confirmed, there will be four key pillars that will guide my service.

First, directing and maintaining active and regular contact with top officials in each island nation and engaging closely with the Pacific Islands Forum, the region's premier intergovernmental organization based in Suva, Fiji. My key goals will be the further cultivation and showcasing of democratic, free market principles rooted in each country's right to choose its own sovereign course; fostering vibrant economies through free, fair, and reciprocal trade and expansion of tourism; promoting and maintaining close partnerships for security and stability on issues ranging from free and open passage for all vessels, to climate change and the scourge of human trafficking.

Second, building and expanding on the successes of the past, by working with the interagency that advocates the interests of American businesses, scholars, tourists, and using people-to-people diplomacy through a variety of cultural and educational exchanges, and reminding our allies of our fidelity to time-honored principles.

Third, engaging citizens from all walks of life in each island nation, demonstrating our common principles and appreciation for their rich history and diverse culture. As a bridge-builder, I look forward to interacting with leaders from civic societies and the faith communities.

Lastly, yet of great importance: my prospective colleagues at the United States Embassy in Fiji who work very hard in service to our nation will be our family. And as with my own immediate family, I will work to ensure their safety and security at all times.

It will be a great pleasure to work with an open door and side-by-side with the mission team to carry on the tremendously effective work in the U.S. diplomatic and consular missions.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for your thoughtful consideration and the opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to your comments and questions.