

Testimony of Roberta S. Jacobson
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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Rubio, Members of the Committee, it is an honor and privilege to be here today as President Obama's nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. I am grateful for the confidence that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have shown in nominating me to serve in this position. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Congress, and in particular this Committee, to strengthen our ties with, and advance our interests throughout the Western Hemisphere.

I am also very grateful to the members of my family who are here today: my husband Jonathan, sons Gil and Daniel, and sister Caryn and brother-in-law Richard. I am the daughter of parents who believed deeply in public service, and who would be enormously proud today. As a member of the Senior Executive Service who has truly come up through the ranks, I have also been lucky to have had a series of remarkable mentors at the State Department, to whom I am deeply indebted. I am particularly grateful to Arturo Valenzuela for selecting me as his deputy.

Mr. Chairman, I entered the State Department in 1986 as a Presidential Management Intern and have spent my entire career focused on this Hemisphere. I am so proud to have been asked to lead the Foreign Service and Civil Service employees – and Locally Employed Staff who represent the United States here in Washington and overseas – they are among the finest public servants and colleagues in the world. The Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs is the second largest of the regional bureaus with over 8,000 employees serving in 50 posts. Of course, our work in the Americas is done hand-in-hand with dedicated colleagues from USAID, DOD, DOE, DHS, DOJ, Treasury, USTR and many other agencies. This “whole of government” approach reflects our increasingly broad engagement in the Americas and is critical to advancing our core national interests in the region. And among the most important of those interests is protecting Americans, whether at home or abroad.

I have worked on U.S policy in the Western Hemisphere for more than a quarter century, and I remain passionate about this Hemisphere, our leadership in it, and the great things we can achieve together. As Secretary Clinton has said, the Western Hemisphere is more vital than ever to our fundamental interests as a nation. To our economic interests, as we rebuild our economy and our competitiveness for a new era; to our security and global strategic interests; to our core values, as we work to advance democracy and human rights everywhere; and to our society and culture, as the profound connections among our people make us more vibrant and innovative. Secretary Clinton has called this the power of proximity – and she does not just mean geographic proximity, but the proximity of our basic interests and challenges and what it will take to overcome them.

This Administration has outlined four strategic priorities in this Hemisphere that guide our policies: effective institutions for democratic governance; strengthened citizen security; expanded economic and social opportunity for all; and a clean energy future. To advance in each of these areas, we have forged pragmatic, flexible partnerships with demonstrated results.

As both the President and Secretary have made clear, we also welcome the global engagement of countries across the Americas, and constantly work to leverage our regional engagement on a wide range of global priorities. First, I would like to start with the global context before turning to our current efforts in the Hemisphere and the results they have yielded. Finally, I want to emphasize the primacy of improved education – in both quality and opportunity – as the sine qua non of all our policies.

Global Issues

Strong partnerships in the Americas will be essential in meeting the global challenges we confront today. While our diplomats must build more robust bilateral ties, they must also construct effective multilateral relationships that enable us to work within and across regions on complex global issues. The range of hemispheric contributions to issues of global importance is striking. Canada provided leadership for the NATO effort in Libya; Uruguay is the largest per capita contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations in the world; Mexico's astute diplomacy advanced global climate change negotiations; Brazil is sharing best practices on conditional cash transfer programs and providing assistance in Africa.

Within the region as well, we have developed innovative partnerships for the common good. These include South American leadership in Haiti, including in MINUSTAH, after the devastating earthquake, and Colombia offering its security expertise to Central America in coordination with our efforts to address transnational crime.

Two key events in the space of a month, thousands of miles apart, will highlight the Americas' growing global role. The President traveled to France for the G-20, and he and Secretary Clinton will soon travel to Hawaii to participate in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum and North American Leaders Summit. In these fora, our leaders work to expand economic opportunity for the United States by increasing the exports and trade opportunities that will create more jobs for Americans. Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and Mexico attended the G-20; Canada, Mexico, Peru, and Chile will be at APEC to promote free trade and economic expansion throughout the Pacific Rim. Secretary Clinton believes that these countries will "accept the responsibility that comes with the new influence...and that they will be fully integrated into the international order." This is why we engage in such robust dialogues with Canada, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and others. And it is why, in addition to the Department's regular exchanges with the European Union, we are engaging an increasing number of Asian partners – including China, Korea, Japan, and, soon, India – in dialogues on issues related to Latin America and the Caribbean.

As the countries of the Americas enhance their global profile – a trend we support and encourage – and make important strides at home, we cannot lose sight of the serious challenges that remain. Transnational crime threatens citizens throughout the Hemisphere. Continuing inequality and poverty limit opportunity. Inadequate education systems continue to handicap our most vulnerable citizens. To varying degrees, a minority of countries abrogate their citizens' fundamental rights.

Democracy and Security: The Importance of Institutions

I see democracy and security as being fundamentally linked to the strength of hemispheric institutions. Electoral democracy can only flourish if citizens and their leaders respect the basic rule of law, and pervasive violence and insecurity inevitably threaten fundamental freedoms and civil liberties. Achieving both freedom and security depends upon the establishment of stronger institutions. This has been a core priority of my

role as the Bureau's coordinator for Citizen Security and will continue to be a priority for me if I am confirmed as Assistant Secretary.

In my current role, I am responsible for coordinating our security initiatives in the Western Hemisphere with other bureaus in the Department, with our interagency partners, with host nations, and with donors. Through this work, it is increasingly clear to me that for our efforts to succeed, democratic institutions must be strengthened – particularly the judiciary and the police. Democracy requires that all citizens can seek and find justice as equals before the law. This is why we place such importance on programs that aid Honduran law enforcement to create task forces to solve and deter crimes against journalists, woman, LGBT persons, and human rights activists, and our programs in Mexico that support alternative dispute resolution mechanisms so that suspects do not spend years awaiting trial. Similarly, in Guatemala we are supporting community councils where local leaders – often women – channel their concerns about security to government leaders, who can then be held accountable.

If I am confirmed, among my highest priorities will be to increase the capacity of law enforcement and judicial institutions and to strengthen the rule of law against the threats of corruption and impunity. We know that this is a fight we must win for all the citizens of the Hemisphere, including Americans at home.

Of course, we recognize that not all countries in the Hemisphere welcome our policy of pragmatic partnerships. In cases where cooperation remains difficult, we will seek areas of convergence and remain open to a more positive relationship, within the context of our fundamental values on democracy and human rights. That is why, should I be confirmed as Assistant Secretary, I will speak out clearly and without hesitation when fundamental democratic principles are threatened and work closely with our partners in the Hemisphere to stand together against those threats.

We condemn governments that limit freedom of expression, weaken institutions of democratic governance, centralize power in the executive, and limit the legitimate rights of the political opposition. In celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, Deputy Secretary Burns noted that “the obligation to democracy neither begins nor ends at the ballot box. Even democratically elected governments can threaten democracy if they do not respect its safeguards, institutions, rules and

values.” Protecting democracy is a hemispheric value. When democracy is threatened, we must all speak up. Although we are ready to provide leadership, and will not hesitate to do so, the United States can defend democracy in the Hemisphere most effectively when we are joined by our hemispheric partners, including multilateral organizations such as the OAS.

In Cuba, we are working to expand the connections between U.S. and Cuban society and open the way for meaningful support of Cubans who are striking their own path, while we keep faith with human rights activists and dissidents who have fought for basic rights for years. With our efforts, more Cubans have access to information and independent connections to the American citizens who are the best ambassadors of our values. We have never wavered in our support of the right of people in Cuba to freely determine their own future – rights far too long denied to them. We also continue to seek the unconditional release of American citizen Alan Gross, a dedicated development worker who has been unjustly imprisoned in Cuba for nearly two years.

Cuba clearly departs most fundamentally from the region’s core democratic values and elections alone do not constitute a democracy, but we remain steadfast in protecting free and fair elections throughout the Hemisphere. Together with a broad range of partners we worked to ensure that Haiti’s elections accurately reflected the will of the Haitian people. We have expressed our clear concerns with the irregularities related to the recent electoral process in Nicaragua, in keeping with the Inter-American Democratic Charter, and we are committed to doing what we can, in partnership with others in the region, to promote the ability of the Venezuelan people to fully express their democratic will.

Social and Economic Inclusion

If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the United States remains at the forefront of promoting economic and social inclusion in the Hemisphere. The economic story of many nations in the Hemisphere is extraordinarily positive: the combined economies of Latin America grew six percent last year, and millions of people are rising out of poverty and into the middle class. The passage of the free trade agreements with Colombia and Panama represents a major diplomatic milestone and they will be an important tool in furthering integration and creating the jobs that will offer opportunity and

higher standards of living. As the State Department focuses on what Secretary Clinton calls economic statecraft, the Americas will be a priority, for as she said, “We believe in the power of proximity to turn growth across the Americas into recovery and jobs here in the United States.”

Despite the progress we have seen, Latin America remains one of the most unequal regions in the world, where millions of citizens are struggling to escape poverty. A key priority of U.S. policy is to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are broadly shared throughout these societies. Free trade agreements are among the tools being harnessed to achieve this.

In October, the U.S. joined another dozen countries along with the OAS, IDB, and others, in the Dominican Republic for the Fourth Ministerial for Pathways to Prosperity, our signature initiative to share best practices and facilitate economic growth that is more socially inclusive, by empowering small business, facilitating trade, building a modern workforce, and promoting sustainable business practices and environmental cooperation. To promote social and economic inclusion, we are also actively engaging with women, persons with disabilities, LGBT persons, youth, and members of Afro descendant and indigenous communities to ensure that they benefit from this process.

Nowhere in the Hemisphere do our efforts on security, democracy, and economic and social inclusion come together more clearly than they do in Haiti – one of the President and the Secretary’s highest priorities. Last year’s devastating earthquake did not just reveal geological fault lines. Today, as President Martelly’s government sets about the enormous challenge of creating accountable, transparent institutions, and rebuilding to reduce poverty and disease in Haiti, our leadership has accomplished a great deal, although there is still much more to be done. From rubble removal to increased agricultural yields, to the opening of a new industrial park, our regional partners have joined with us and the international community to answer the call and demonstrate just how much these partnerships can accomplish for the people of Haiti.

Energy

Advancing social and economic progress in the Hemisphere will also require a renewed commitment to energy security. This is especially important in the Americas, which supplies over half of our imported oil. Not

only is the region home to abundant hydrocarbons, but many countries are leading in the development of renewable energy, and leaders are committed to working together to strengthen energy security and address the challenges of climate change. In recognition of this reality, the President created the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA) at the last Summit of the Americas. It promotes clean energy technologies, low carbon development, reduced emissions from deforestation, and climate-resilient planning. ECPA also serves as a vehicle for public-private partnerships including the promotion of promising, innovative, clean, and renewable energy projects, and financing mechanisms that bridge the gap among investors, clean energy entrepreneurs, and project developers. Beyond ECPA, we maintain energy dialogues with Brazil, Canada, and Mexico. We also have bilateral discussions with important regional electricity suppliers, like Colombia, which is working to link electricity grids with Panama and its Andean neighbors, and increase exports of clean power to its neighbors.

All the themes I've mentioned will be highlighted in the objectives that the United States will seek to advance at the upcoming Summit of the Americas, scheduled to take place next April in Cartagena, Colombia. The Summit is an opportunity to reaffirm, reinvigorate, and drive our common agenda. The theme of the Summit is "Connecting the Americas: Partners for Prosperity" and this gathering will enable us to solidify our achievements over the last three years and launch new initiatives with partners in the region to achieve our goals.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to highlight one final topic in particular that is central to so much of our strategy in the Hemisphere: education. Just as judicial systems are central to strong democratic institutions, expanding the quality and reach of education is also critical to advancing the ambitious project of a prosperous and democratic Hemisphere.

The Hemisphere's children will grow up in a region that has witnessed the rapid proliferation of global business opportunities. But many of its citizens lack the education, skills, and training to take advantage of this historic shift. Addressing this education gap will be crucial to the future competitiveness of the Americas. During his visit to Chile in March, President Obama announced a new goal, "100,000 Strong in the Americas," to increase the number of U.S. students studying in Latin America and the Caribbean to 100,000, with the reciprocal number of students from the region studying in the United States. President Rousseff launched her

“Science without Borders” program to give more Brazilians opportunities, especially in the critical fields of science, technology, engineering, and math. We are asking the private sector to support exchange programs, finance scholarships, and offer internships, training, and mentoring for exchange students.

Through USAID programs, the United States is supporting literacy education and increasing access to education opportunities for disadvantaged groups. Even our citizen security programs support education to provide training and internship opportunities for youth to ensure they have alternatives to violence and crime.

The youth demographic in the Americas will also require the United States to develop more agile and tech-savvy diplomacy. We must be as good at NGO outreach, citizen-to-citizen exchange, and using social media as we are at delivering traditional diplomatic messages. We are working with social media leaders to leverage technology to solve real world problems. We have organized TechCamps in Santiago and Montevideo and are planning another in conjunction with the Summit of the Americas. These are examples of government, private sector, and civil society coming together to develop innovative ways for technology to broaden educational opportunities. If we are to meet the challenges we face as a Hemisphere, we must fully harness new technologies.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, during my twenty-five years working on this region at the State Department, I have witnessed this Hemisphere undergo dramatic and positive changes. I am confident that the new partnerships we are forging and leading are the best way to work with a region that is rapidly coming into its own, where many countries now have both the will and the capacity to be equal partners. These times demand a very different kind of U.S. engagement – an engagement that is broader and more direct, younger, and more global than ever before.

Mr. Chairman, this Committee has invested heavily in supporting our priorities in the Western Hemisphere in recent years and I want to thank you for that support. All of you have been among the most important advocates for these vital issues and relationships. Engagement between the executive and legislative branches is essential to achieving our shared objectives. If

confirmed by the Senate, I would be honored to work with you, your staffs, members of this Committee, and the Congress, to advance the goals we all share in the Americas. Thank you and I look forward to answering any questions you and the Committee may have.