

Written Statement of Peter A. Selfridge
Confirmation Hearing for Chief of Protocol of the United States
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 6, 2014

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. It is a tremendous honor for me to appear before this distinguished body as President Obama's nominee for Chief of Protocol of the United States. I deeply appreciate the confidences of the President and Secretary Kerry in nominating me for this position.

My story is not unlike those of many in this room today. I am a descendant of immigrants and a proud son of the Midwest. I was born in Illinois, raised in Minnesota, and educated in Iowa. My mother hailed from Germany where she was born and raised in the shadow of World War II; my father is a second generation Chicagoland native of Scottish and Irish heritage. My wife's parents hail from Gujrat, India, and came to America, as did my mother and grandparents decades prior, in search of a dream that they will gratefully tell you has been fulfilled many times over thanks to opportunities offered by this great country.

My father taught me at an early age that good etiquette and decorum are not only useful tools for navigating society, but a reflection of the person wielding them. Treating others as you would be treated is a virtue for everyday life, and it is one of the guiding principles of Protocol.

As Director of Advance and Operations for the President and in a similar role for the Vice President before that, I have had the honor of serving as the White House's lead logistical representative on official travel overseas. I have had the privilege of working with some of the best and brightest American ambassadors and diplomats at our missions and consulates abroad and interacted with many of the very same protocol officers and foreign government officials who, if confirmed, I hope to work closely with as Chief of Protocol.

Mr. Chairman, as you and the members of this esteemed committee know well, the Office of the Chief of Protocol plays an important role in advancing the foreign policy goals of the United States. The person selected for this post serves as the President's representative to visiting foreign leaders and their delegations, as well

as the members of the foreign Diplomatic Corps and consular communities based in the United States. Not only is this a great honor, it also provides remarkable opportunities to create an environment for successful diplomacy, to promote cross-cultural exchanges, and to build new bridges of understanding with leaders, governments, and citizens throughout the world.

I believe that we are obligated to use every diplomatic tool at our disposal to broaden our bilateral relationships, as well as to set the stage where diplomacy can be made to work. The Office of Protocol provides many such tools to our government and its representatives. The talented people who work in Protocol serve on the front lines of diplomatic engagement, and, if confirmed, it would be a great privilege to join them in carrying out this critical mission.

The team at Blair House—the President’s Guest House—works tirelessly to ensure that foreign dignitaries are properly accommodated, as well as provided for and protected during their stay. What’s more, it’s a living museum that houses a considerable collection of treasured art and artifacts—many of which bear witness to pivotal moments in our nation’s history.

The Ceremonials division plans and executes official events hosted by the Secretary of State. This dedicated staff meticulously provides for the participation of the Diplomatic Corps in special events and official public functions including Joint Sessions of Congress, inaugurations, funerals, and other ceremonies, large and small.

The Diplomatic Affairs division diligently oversees the accreditation of foreign ambassadors, diplomatic agents, and consular officers—thousands of individuals posted throughout the United States.

And the Diplomatic Partnerships Division works to strengthen and deepen our government’s—our nation’s—relationships with the Diplomatic Corps. As you know, there are more than one hundred and eighty foreign ambassadors sent to the United States to represent their country’s interests. This expert team engages those diplomats through a wide array of programming designed to foster goodwill, promote new partnerships, and enhance mutual understanding between their countries and our own.

Protocol's Visits division manages the logistical planning behind hundreds of visits by foreign dignitaries to the United States, as well as all official engagements with President Obama, Vice President Biden, Secretary Kerry, and other officials.

Through their important work, the Chief of Protocol extends the first hand that welcomes these chiefs of state and heads of government to our country. This team also helps to plan and execute U.S.-hosted summits and other multilateral events, as well as supports presidential delegations in their travel abroad.

Protocol also assists with the selection of gifts given by the President, Vice President, First Lady, and Secretary of State in their engagements with foreign leaders.

The work of the Office of Protocol provides a unique opportunity to showcase the very best America has to offer, not only as hosts, but as true partners in diplomacy.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today, and for your consideration of my nomination. I look forward to your questions.