

Testimony of Judith B. Cefkin
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of Fiji, the Republic of Kiribati, the
Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga, and Tuvalu
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today as the President's nominee to be United States Ambassador to the Republic of the Fiji Islands, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru, the Kingdom of Tonga, and Tuvalu. I am grateful to the President and the Secretary for their confidence in nominating me for this position, and I am equally grateful to receive your consideration.

With the Chairman's permission, I would like to introduce my husband, Paul Boyd. Paul, who is also a Foreign Service Officer, has just returned from his assignment in Seoul, Korea. With this assignment, Paul has capped over 40 years of public service, including combat service with the U.S. Special Forces and nine years as a police officer. For the past 30 years, we have shared the adventure of the Foreign Service.

As a Foreign Service Officer I have been privileged to serve in a varied and fascinating mix of assignments touching on practically every region of the world. Certainly, the Asia-Pacific region has been a cherished area of focus, and much of my career has been dedicated to issues of countries in transition, striving to advance democratic and economic development. In my current position as Senior Advisor for Burma, I have been honored to work closely with Congress to elaborate strategies to expand freedom and opportunity for the people of Burma as they navigate a historic transition. As Deputy Chief of Mission in Thailand, I took pride in motivating collaboration among a diverse and dynamic 3,000-person interagency team to enhance Bangkok's position as a regional platform supporting programs and operations throughout Asia. And as Deputy Chief of Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was gratifying to guide U.S. initiatives to cement the peace established by the Dayton Accords and encourage Bosnia's path toward integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

My experience has taught me the power of our country's values-based diplomacy. If confirmed, I will relish the opportunity to draw on these lessons and my many years of regional policy experience to advance the United States' strategic interests in the South Pacific.

The United States is a Pacific nation. We share an important history with the Pacific Island nations. We also share a common destiny. This is reflected in President Obama's rebalance to the dynamic Asia-Pacific region. If confirmed, I look forward to working in partnership with the five nations to which I would be accredited to seek to ensure that our common future is one of prosperity, peace and stability, and human fulfillment.

Perhaps nowhere is the need for this focus more compelling than on the waters that bind us – those of the mighty Pacific Ocean. As Secretary Kerry noted when he organized the recent Oceans Conference, our oceans facilitate our trade and provide much of the food we eat and even the air we breathe. This is abundantly true for the Pacific. Yet, today, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, Tonga and Fiji face dramatic challenges related to rising sea levels, ocean warming and acidification, marine pollution, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and overfishing. These challenges threaten the very existence of some of their populations. They also threaten broader global commerce and food security – issues that directly impact the United States. If confirmed I will strive to advance solutions to improve regional environmental management, support adaptation projects, and promote Exclusive Economic Zones' surveillance arrangements and sustainable fisheries methods.

The Pacific Island nations are global players. Both Fiji and Tonga have been important contributors to international Peacekeeping Operations. Fijian forces are currently participating in the UN Disengagement Observer Force mission in the Golan, the Multinational Force and Observers mission in the Sinai, and the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq, where they are responsible for providing security for mission personnel and facilities. Tonga was an early member of the Coalition to liberate Iraq, and until April of this year provided security at Camp Bastion in Afghanistan. Kiribati, Nauru, and Tuvalu are also committed to their responsibilities as UN members, and the United States cooperates closely with them on a wide range of issues in that forum. Furthermore, Fiji plays many important roles in the Pacific region as a hub for commerce, diplomacy, and academic affairs as well as transportation and communications. Suva is home to the University of the South Pacific and the headquarters of the Pacific Islands Forum, the preeminent multilateral organization in the region. It is also home to regional offices of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, which manages technical and development programs throughout the Pacific. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to build this regional and global cooperation.

Success in tackling our common regional and global challenges will depend on fostering the internal strength of our Pacific Island partners that comes from strong democratic institutions, rule of law, and respect for human rights. The Pacific Islanders share our respect for democratic values, but realizing those values in practice has been challenging, most notably in Fiji and to varying degrees in the other countries as well. We are encouraged that after eight years of a coup-installed military regime, Fiji is scheduled to hold elections on September 17 that offer the hope of return to democratic governance. The Kingdom of Tonga, which has also made progress toward a more representative form of government, holds its elections later this year. If confirmed, I will take great satisfaction in working to build foundations of democracy and good governance through all means available to us, including by expanding people-to-people ties and nurturing civil society. And as a special personal priority, I will champion efforts to combat violence against women – sadly, a challenge with which all too many South Pacific women struggle.

Embassy Suva is responsible for the United States' largest geographic consular district in the world – over two million square miles. In addition to Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, and Tuvalu, that includes French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna. An estimated 45,000 American Citizens are resident in these countries and territories and 30,000 more are estimated to visit each year to enjoy the region's wealth of natural wonders and rich cultural diversity. At the same time the region is challenged by almost yearly cyclones, floods, and tsunami warnings. If confirmed, I will make emergency preparedness and attention to support for American citizens a priority focus.

My career at the State Department has taught me that our people are our most precious resource. If confirmed, it will be my privilege to lead Embassy Suva's diverse and dedicated team of American and local staff and to support our 85 Peace Corps Volunteers who are serving in Fiji and Tonga. I will work diligently to ensure our Mission Community's safety and security and to advance the professional enrichment of every member of our team.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for considering my nomination. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with this Committee and others in Congress to realize the full potential of our Pacific partnerships. It would be my pleasure to answer any questions that you might have.