

Statement of Donald H. Gips  
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of South Africa  
Before the Committee on Foreign Relations  
United States Senate  
July 21, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of South Africa. I am grateful and humbled by the trust placed in me by the President and the Secretary of State. If I might, I would like to recognize and thank my three sons, Sam, Peter and Ben, and my wife Liz, who has dedicated her life to improving the lives of children, most recently running a non-profit organization focused on educating orphans and vulnerable children in Kenya.

South Africa's historic struggle and the vision of Nelson Mandela inspired our President when he was in college to make his first political speech, and demonstrated to me, also a college student, that people united in the pursuit of justice can transform a nation. When I visited South Africa over a decade ago, I fell in love with the country: its people, its story, and its beauty. It is a great honor to have the opportunity to represent the United States as it supports South Africa's efforts to expand the scope of its multiracial democracy and to build upon our existing programming to enhance our overall bilateral relations.

If confirmed, I would bring to this role my private and public sector experience leading teams in strategy-setting and my passion for problem-solving. My two White House tours, first as Domestic Policy Advisor to Vice President Gore and currently as Director of Presidential Personnel for

President Obama, have let me participate in policy-making and problem solving at the highest levels. I have successfully negotiated international treaties during my tenure as head of the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) International Bureau. I helped set up the government program AmeriCorps, which built on my lifelong enthusiasm for community service, including doing development work in a small village in Sri Lanka. My private sector experience, including ten years as head of Mergers and Acquisitions and chief strategy officer at Level 3 Communications, and four years at McKinsey & Company, have given me firsthand knowledge of the difficulties of operating a business in the international arena as well as the skills to manage one of our largest embassies in sub-Saharan Africa.

If I am confirmed, I believe my varied experiences will make me a strong envoy. Both our nations have recently elected new Presidents in demonstrations of democracy at work. The opportunities and challenges facing South Africa are many, and all sectors -- public, private and non-profit -- will have to come together to help South Africa realize its potential. I appreciate that, if confirmed as the next U.S. Ambassador to South Africa, I will be serving at a critical juncture and will have the opportunity to move the relationship between our two countries to a true strategic partnership encompassing all sectors of American and South African society.

This partnership starts from a simple premise: that it is in the United States' strategic interest for South Africa to succeed in its historic transformation from apartheid to a true multiracial democracy, where all South Africans share in the nation's prosperity and economic opportunity.

Blessed with great natural resources and intellectual capital, host to the 2010 World Cup, South Africa is the economic engine for sub-Saharan Africa, and South Africa's prosperity is critical to strengthening the continent's economic and political stability.

Unfortunately, South Africa also faces significant challenges, including high levels of unemployment, inadequate education and housing for many, an HIV/AIDS epidemic, crime, and significant income disparity. These forces pose serious challenges to the country's stability. President Zuma has been very forthright in recognizing these challenges and setting his government on a course to address them. While our foreign assistance resources are limited relative to the resources the South African government is mobilizing to address these issues, the United States and South Africa have a genuine shared interest in finding ways to best leverage our assistance and expertise to help the Government of South Africa tackle these persistent and challenging problems.

Only by returning the South African economy to its growth trajectory can its massive unemployment, currently estimated at 23 percent, be addressed. If I am confirmed, I will work to build on the significant private sector engagement that already exists between our countries and strengthen our trade and investment relationships to stimulate the economy.

Widespread unemployment cannot be addressed without significantly improving the education system. The United States can play a role in this effort, providing assistance directly and through the efforts of the numerous

U.S. non-profit organizations working in South Africa. This will be a major priority for me should I be confirmed.

President Zuma has also said, “Crime is a major national challenge and the fight against crime and corruption needs to be stepped up.” Supporting the South African government as it tries to improve the quality of its police and judicial systems is just one of the ways we can help South Africa effectively deal with its crime problem.

Addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa, where it has spread to over 10 percent of the population, is a major priority for the United States. President Zuma has set a goal of reducing the rate of new infections by 50 percent by 2011. The United States is supporting this goal with over \$500 million provided annually through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Should I be confirmed, I will ensure we focus on prevention as well as treatment in order to make this program sustainable.

We must continue our efforts to work with South Africa when it comes to its troubled neighbor, Zimbabwe. South Africa has taken a leadership role in mediation between the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic-Front (ZANU-PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The Global Political Agreement (GPA) that is now in place allows for guarded optimism that better times may be ahead for Zimbabwe. South Africa should be encouraged to use its leadership role as a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and as a guarantor of the GPA to step in and mediate the disagreements that have and will arise.

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, should I be confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee and the larger Congress to make our relationship with South Africa even more productive than it is today. When our two great nations pursue common goals, the potential to achieve great things for our citizens is unlimited. Thank you for this opportunity to address you today and for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering your questions.

