

Statement by S. Fitzgerald Haney
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 10, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to serve as the next United States Ambassador to Costa Rica.

I am profoundly humbled by this opportunity to serve and thank the President and the Secretary of State for the confidence they have placed in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in Congress to protect U.S. citizens in Costa Rica, deepen the bonds that unite our countries, and advance U.S. interests in Central America.

With the Chairman's permission, I would like to acknowledge friends and family without whose support I would not be here today - starting with my wife Rabbi Andrea Haney and my children Asher, Nava, Eden, and Shaia. If I am confirmed, my wife and our four children will be joining me in San Jose and it is only through their love and support that I am here today. I would also like to acknowledge my mother-in-law Betsy Dobrick, my brothers and sisters-in-law Adam and Allison Dobrick and Jeremy Dobrick and Tamara Hoover, and various close friends, whose support means so much to me and my family.

Finally, I would also like to mention my mother, father, and brother, may they rest in peace, who are here today with us in our hearts. My mother, Sandra Haney, was, and still is, my hero. As a young widow with two young children, she left home and family to provide my brother and me with the best education and opportunities she could. Working during the day and going to school at night, she showed us, by her example, that the United States is truly the land of opportunity for those who work hard on a level playing field. She did not have it easy as a single African-American woman raising two children alone in the 1970's, but she never gave up and she knew her sacrifices would allow her children to have a better life. It was her firmly held belief; one which she passed on, that America's core values should serve as an example throughout the world. She also was a link in a long line of family that has in various ways served our nation proudly. From a 5th great grand uncle who fought in the Revolutionary War to my brother who served both overseas and at home to my great uncle who recently received an honorary doctorate in public service and was recognized by the Tennessee state legislature to my mother's marches and sit-ins to protest what she saw as injustices not compatible with the America we aspire to be - we have a long and proud tradition of serving our nation. It is in my mother's honor

and in her memory that I hope, if I am confirmed, to dedicate my service.

Costa Rica is an important ally in a region of critical strategic importance to the United States. It is the most stable democracy in Central America, and its long-held traditions of protecting human rights and freedom of expression are a model for the region. Its strong commitment to investing in education and health has helped Costa Rica achieve high literacy, life expectancy, and income levels and a low infant mortality rate. It is no surprise that these positive attributes have attracted significant numbers of Americans to the country. Today, approximately 100,000 U.S. citizens call Costa Rica home and more than one million visit annually. If confirmed, their safety and well-being will be my top priority.

Despite its successes, Costa Rica confronts many challenges, including security challenges, as international drug trafficking organizations and organized crime increasingly penetrate Central America. The United States and Costa Rica enjoy an excellent partnership in security cooperation. If confirmed, I will continue to work with the government of Costa Rica to ensure that organized crime does not undermine the country's economy and democratic institutions.

If confirmed, another of my highest priorities will be promoting greater Central American integration. As outlined in the Strategy for U.S. Engagement in Central America, the region will not prosper without better regional cooperation on trade, infrastructure development, strengthened democratic institutions, energy integration, and investment. Greater integration has long been an aspiration in Central America, but effective mechanisms for achieving that goal have remained elusive. The United States can play a constructive role in helping Central America create jobs and economic opportunities for its 43 million people, by helping the region improve infrastructure, integrate markets, reduce non-tariff barriers, and benefit more from its free trade agreement.

Given its stability and relative prosperity, Costa Rica can help play a critical role in advancing our strategy in Central America. It can help lead in working to create conditions in Central America that are conducive to further reducing poverty and violence and creating jobs and opportunity and it can serve as an example of what is possible in the region. President Solis has stated a commitment to working to promote regional integration and prosperity, and, if confirmed, I will support him in those efforts. I will also work to create stronger linkages between the American Chambers of Commerce in Central America, so that the private sector is fully incorporated into the process of seeking solutions to the region's development challenges.

I have many years' experience living and working in international business in Mexico,

Central America, the Caribbean, and Brazil. I understand the region and the challenges it faces. As President Solis made clear during his first year in office; Costa Rica is serious about improving its business climate, and attracting foreign investment. If confirmed, my private sector experience will be an asset in helping Costa Rica advance in those areas. It will also serve me in working to advocate for stronger intellectual property protection, promote entrepreneurship and public-private partnerships, and ensure that U.S. companies and investors encounter a fair and level playing field for doing business in Costa Rica.

If confirmed, I will work closely with Costa Rica to advance the many other policy objectives and priorities the United States and Costa Rica share. Costa Rica shares our commitment to protecting democratic freedoms and human rights, and is vigilantly resisting any attempts to weaken the Inter-American Human Rights System. This support for basic human rights, democracy and freedom has never been more important in the region than today. Costa Rica is an international leader with important initiatives to mitigate and adapt to climate change and promote renewable energy use and sustainable development. I believe Costa Rica can become a regional hub of innovation and has the potential to assume a leadership role in advancing good governance and prosperity throughout Central America.

As our dedicated team at Embassy San Jose states: a safe, prosperous and green Costa Rica not only benefits the citizens of both of our nations, but also the entirety of Central America.

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members, I thank you again for your consideration of my nomination to serve as Ambassador to Costa Rica, and I welcome your questions.