

**STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR LARRY L. PALMER
NOMINEE TO BE AMBASSADOR TO ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA,
BARBADOS, DOMINICA, GRENADA, ST. KITTS AND NEVIS, ST.
LUCIA, AND ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 7, 2012**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the honor and privilege of appearing before you as nominee for the United States Ambassador to the Caribbean nations of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I am grateful to President Obama and Secretary Clinton for their confidence and trust in nominating me for this position. If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to representing our country and working with you to advance the interests of the United States in the Caribbean.

Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean nations represent nearly half of all countries in the Caribbean, an important region on the United States' southern border. Traditional allies and friends, with shared culture and dedication to democracy and rule of law, these nations play an important role both bilaterally and in multilateral organizations like the Organization of American States and the United Nations. I am honored to have been nominated to represent the United States in this important region.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will make the continuing safety of American residents and visitors in the Caribbean my top priority. The continuing success of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI) is vitally important to providing for the safety and security of the United States by ensuring that Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean can combat transnational organized crime and avoid the violence and instability seen elsewhere in the hemisphere. As a result of ongoing CBSI programming and engagement, the United States and the countries of the

Caribbean are working more closely than ever on security and justice system-related projects. The inclusion of anti-crime and anti-gang youth development and empowerment programs is an important component of CBSI and reflects the role youth play in these societies and in their development as nations. We are also working closely with Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean nations to combat trafficking in persons.

The global economic downturn has hit the region particularly hard, exacerbating already significant economic hardship. Some Eastern Caribbean countries are struggling with very high debt levels and a number have undertaken International Monetary Fund (IMF) standby programs and are reaching out to the Paris Club for debt restructuring. This difficult economic situation has prevented the Eastern Caribbean nations from reaching their full development potential. If confirmed, I will build on prior work and lead American efforts to promote economic prosperity, trade, and entrepreneurship in the region.

The high cost of energy in the region also affects Caribbean economies. The United States seeks to promote alternative energy in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. Our goal under the President's Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA) is to assist countries to diversify energy supplies with more renewable energy, and to increase engagement on climate change adaptation. Under an ECPA grant, six Eastern Caribbean country proposals were selected by the OAS to receive clean energy technical assistance. These projects range from solar energy pilot projects in national parks to the development of geothermal resources. Secretary Clinton in June announced an ECPA climate change adaptation initiative focused on Caribbean-specific climate modeling and adaptation planning in partnership with the University of the West Indies and one or more universities in the United States. If confirmed, I will work to further these

projects and continue to promote cheaper and more sustainable energy throughout the region.

Another critical challenge in the region is HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS infection rates in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, while lower than those in some neighboring countries, are nevertheless high in vulnerable populations, especially among youth and women. HIV/AIDS-related illnesses are a major cause of death for persons between the ages of 15 and 44. If confirmed, I will strongly support U.S. programs of prevention and services in the region through the President's Emergency Action Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) which is integral to these efforts.

While women in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean have made some gains since the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, significant barriers to full and equal citizenship still remain. Women in these countries play a strong role in politics, education, and social issues. Access to education is high and the majority of university students are women. However, after their education is complete, many women are either unable to find jobs or only find work in lower status and lower paying positions. While women are represented among government ministers, they constitute only a tenth of parliamentarians in Barbados and most of the Eastern Caribbean. Domestic violence and violence against women remain grave concerns in the region. Despite these obstacles, women leaders in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean are extraordinary, and are diligently working to overcome the challenges they face. If confirmed, I will work to increase awareness and action to improve the opportunities available to women and girls. Along with this, the integration of women's issues throughout our policies and programs is absolutely necessary, particularly in such programs as CBSI, ECPA, and economic participation and entrepreneurship support.

As 2011 marked the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps, I would also like to note our long-standing Peace Corps presence in the Eastern Caribbean which plays a major role in providing U.S. assistance to the region. St. Lucia was among the first countries to receive volunteers in 1961. Currently 115 volunteers work in the region in four main areas: Youth Development, Institutional/NGO Development, Small Business Development, and Special Education.

Thank you again for giving me the honor of appearing before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.