

Statement of Craig R. Stapleton
Foreign Relations Committee
U.S. Senate – May 24, 2005

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to make a brief statement.

I am honored to appear before this committee as President Bush's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to France. I would like to thank the President and Secretary Rice for the confidence they have shown in selecting me for this challenging assignment.

I am very pleased to have with me today my wife, Debbie, and my son Walker, whom I would like to introduce to the Committee.

Mr. Chairman, as the U.S. Ambassador to the Czech Republic, I have had the opportunity of seeing Europe, NATO and the European Union from the perspective of the new democracy of the Czech Republic. Our Embassy worked with the Czech government on its entry into NATO, its role as host of the 2002 NATO Summit, and supported the Czech Republic's accession

to the European Union. The Czech Republic proved a stalwart ally and supporter of America after September 11, and contributed troops to the liberation of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Now, if confirmed by the United States Senate, I shall have the opportunity to work with our oldest ally, France, in strengthening our bilateral relations, working closely to combat the terrorist threats worldwide, energizing NATO for its role in resolving conflicts, and supporting the European Union.

As a schoolboy in 1962, I visited the Normandy beaches and the American cemetery there. The image of the cliffs of Point du Hoc and its white rows of crosses and Stars of David has stayed in my thoughts since then. I am also mindful of the diplomacy of Benjamin Franklin in Paris in 1776, who solicited France's active support of our revolution.

Nonetheless, as deep differences between the U.S. and France over Iraq have demonstrated, being allies, even very old ones, does not guarantee agreement on every issue. We have emerged from a difficult period with a shared understanding of the need to manage differences with care, and with the conviction that we must not allow them to threaten the core of our

alliance.

As Secretary Rice stated during a recent speech in Paris: “It is time to open a new chapter in our relationship, a new chapter of our alliance.” One need only consider what we have been able to accomplish together during one of the most difficult periods in our relationship to glimpse the potential promise of a reinvigorated U.S. – France alliance.

U.S. – French cooperation in the fight against terrorism has been exemplary. Since the attacks on September 11, U.S. and French law enforcement and intelligence agencies have cooperated continuously and successfully in counteracting terrorist threats.

President Bush stated in his 2005 inaugural address, “The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies’ defeat.” If confirmed, I pledge to work as closely as possible with our oldest ally to promote democracy in the Middle East, the former Soviet republics, and Africa.

Our political differences notwithstanding, U.S. – France military-to-military

cooperation during the past few years has been notable. France has been with us in Afghanistan since the start of operations there. France has been a key partner in the war against terrorism, in Operation Enduring Freedom, and has been a major contributor to NATO's International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF). We are working together in Kosovo, where a French general currently commands the NATO peacekeeping mission. In Haiti last year, the U.S. and France led the effort to stabilize the country until an international peacekeeping force could be assembled. In Africa, the U.S. and France are working together to strengthen the capacities of African militaries and sub-regional organizations to prevent, mitigate and resolve crises on the continent. This is an impressive record in the face of differences on Iraq.

A stronger partnership between the U.S. and France will enhance our ability to meet challenges outside of Europe. U.S. and French leadership in the United Nations and in Lebanon is promoting a sovereign and independent Lebanon, free of Syrian domination. We also are supporting the EU-3 on Iran's nuclear programs and on a range of other non-proliferation issues. We are leaders together in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa. We are cooperating to promote reform in the Broader Middle East and to achieve

the shared goal of two states, Israeli and Palestinian, living side-by-side in peace and security. This is an important agenda. Our work together is producing results.

Assisting the Iraqi people and Iraq's new government in the transition to democracy is a priority France has made clear that it shares. France has recently taken steps to demonstrate that support. I plan to work closely with the French government to encourage greater French engagement in Iraq's political development and economic reconstruction.

We will not always agree on all issues. We differ with France and other EU member states on the question of lifting the EU arms embargo on China. I intend to continue a frank and open dialogue with the French government regarding our serious concerns about such a move, while encouraging the broader strategic discussions on China that the U.S. and the EU have embarked upon.

If confirmed, I will work to ensure the continued health and vibrancy of our bilateral economic relationship. The U.S. is now the primary destination for French foreign direct investment and the U.S. is the third largest foreign

investor in France. There are 2,500 subsidiaries of U.S. firms in France and approximately the same number of French firms in the U.S. Together, these businesses have created more than one million jobs. France is also an important trading partner; U.S.-France trade exceeds \$70 billion a year. I will work to ensure that outstanding trade differences are resolved, so that U.S. businesses are not unfairly disadvantaged.

In addition to the wide range of foreign policy, economic, and security issues that connect and engage the U.S. and France on the governmental level, a rich web of cultural, educational and scientific exchanges links our people. Travel between the U.S. and France contributes to mutual understanding and appreciation. I intend to work hard to ensure that the Embassy's practices, and the policies we develop in concert with French authorities, enhance border security while enabling legitimate travelers to visit the U.S. without undue delay or difficulty.

If confirmed, I also will work to ensure that our exchange programs are geared toward younger generations, are relevant to the challenges of the 21st century, and create opportunities for broader segments of our societies to understand each other's countries better.

Mr. Chairman, the President and Secretary Rice have made clear that public diplomacy is a top priority and I am ready to do my part. During my tenure as Ambassador to the Czech Republic, I played an active role in shaping and implementing the Embassy's public diplomacy strategy. If confirmed, I will work to deepen further an already active program of public outreach. I would like to explore new avenues for engaging and informing all segments of French society, including its significant Muslim population. Perceptions of U.S. foreign policy, across the board among the French public, continue to be negative, and misperceptions about basic American values exist. I intend to participate actively in the Embassy's outreach efforts to foster a better understanding of the United States.

One of the lessons I learned at post in Prague was that diplomacy is a team sport. The talented and dedicated officers of the State Department and other agencies and Foreign Service Nationals, indispensable to our team, are more than up to the challenge. I am confident these men and women will meet the opportunities and challenges of representing the United States in France.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, I am honored that President

Bush has asked me to lead this diplomatic mission.