

Statement of Peter Cianchette  
Ambassador-Designate to Costa Rica  
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
April 16, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for granting me the opportunity to appear before this august body.

I am honored and humbled to be here as President Bush's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Costa Rica. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Rice for their confidence and trust in sending my name to the Senate for your consideration.

With the Committee's indulgence, I would like to introduce my wife of nearly 22 years, Carolyn, who is here with me today, along with my son, Evan, and my daughter, Maria. My family is excited about the prospect of serving in Costa Rica and has been extremely supportive when contemplating the possibility of this major transition. Also with us today are my parents, Bud and Priscilla Cianchette.

Mr. Chairman, I am truly honored by this potential opportunity to serve in Costa Rica. If confirmed, I believe my extensive public service and business experience would help me to strengthen our relationship with this important regional ally.

My service in the Maine state legislature gave me valuable experience that I believe will be useful if I am confirmed. Legislative work requires the ability to demonstrate leadership and build consensus. An effective legislator listens to the citizens he serves and responds to their concerns, as well as those of colleagues and the many other stakeholders in any particular policy. Everything I've learned suggests that an effective ambassador must lead the embassy staff in the country, but build consensus as a team player within the interagency community so that all U.S. equities are represented.

In business, as in public service and diplomacy, the ability to connect with people is essential. My experience as an executive with a Spanish-owned manufacturing company has prepared me well to take advantage of the opportunities presented by working in a different cultural context. Indeed, decades of work with people at all different levels in business,

public service, and civic organizations have taught me that the one sure way to connect with someone is to tap into aspirations.

And Costa Rica is a nation of great aspirations. With its rich tradition of individualism and democracy, this staunch U.S. ally is a model for other countries in the region in several respects. A bastion of stability in an often-troubled region, Costa Rica abolished its military in 1948 to channel investment into social services such as healthcare and education. Costa Rica has progressively preserved its abundant natural resources. Last year, the poverty rate fell to a 30-year low, a historic achievement. However, at this critical juncture Costa Rica faces new challenges.

Costa Rica, the United States, and other countries in the region face shared security threats from human and drug traffickers, terrorists, and other criminals. In 2006, a greater amount of illicit narcotics was interdicted in Costa Rica than any other country in Central America except Panama. Costa Rica is grappling with domestic crime on an unprecedented scale. Fortunately, we have a willing partner in the Arias administration that seeks for Costa Rica to play a pivotal role in an integrated regional response to these threats. If the President's Merida Initiative is approved, Costa Rica's law enforcement personnel will receive training and equipment to improve their ability to interdict drug traffic and combat crime.

Security concerns already affect the hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens who visit and reside in Costa Rica each year. If confirmed, I would have no greater priority than protecting American citizens. Having traveled and conducted business abroad, I understand what a tremendous resource a U.S. embassy can be, whether for replacing a lost passport or communicating lifesaving information during a natural disaster.

From among other issues, if confirmed, I would do my utmost to help Costa Rica become a full partner of the Central America-Dominican Republic-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR). The United States has a vibrant trade relationship with Costa Rica that is likely to make Costa Ricans the biggest beneficiaries of free trade in the region once the agreement is fully implemented. From 2005 to 2006 trade between Costa Rica and the U.S. rose by almost 14%. Having long enjoyed access to our market through the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), Costa Rica is now ready for CAFTA-DR.

President Arias' leadership on this issue has been impressive. If confirmed, I will use my professional experience to foster stronger trade, tourism, and investment ties between our two nations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, for the privilege of appearing before you. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.