

**Statement of Raul Yzaguirre
Ambassador-Designate to the Dominican Republic
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
March 11, 2010**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. I am honored to be President Obama's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Dominican Republic. I would like to express my gratitude to President Obama for his confidence in nominating me and to Secretary Clinton for her trust as well.

Thank you, Senator McCain, for introducing me. This is my wife, Audrey, who has supported me through many years, and with whom I am excited to embark on another journey. I am grateful for her presence here today.

Mr. Chairman, the President offered me a unique opportunity when he nominated me to be Ambassador to the Dominican Republic. I have worked many years for the rights of people here in the United States, often times in partnership with Congress, including Members of this Committee. It pleases me that, if confirmed, I will be able to continue my efforts in this endeavor on behalf of the President and the American people as Ambassador.

The United States and the Dominican Republic share a relationship that runs the gamut from business, trade, sports, and culture. However, the most important relationship between our countries is the one between each of our citizens.

Secretary of State Clinton and Dominican President Leonel Fernandez, who have worked together on a variety of issues, most recently on responding the earthquake in neighboring Haiti, exemplify this type of relationship.

Family ties between the United States and the Dominican Republic are another important link connecting our two countries. There a million people of Dominican descent in the United States and a hundred thousand Americans who have made their home in the Dominican Republic. Then there are the over one million American tourists who visit every year, creating and enhancing ties with each individual visit.

One of my primary concerns, if confirmed, will be that of public security and safety, and the efforts to cooperate with Dominican authorities on anticorruption and counternarcotics programs. Appropriately, an integral part of USG assistance will be the development of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, or CBSI, which President Obama proposed at the 2009 Summit of the Americas, and has been funded by Congress. The Dominicans to date have been active members in

developing CBSI, including hosting a working group meeting in October 2009; if confirmed I will encourage them to continue their high-profile role in this and other regional initiatives in order to realize the potential for regional synergies that are possible. The problem of narcotrafficking, and the associated corruption afflicting countries that do not confront this scourge, are serious and must be addressed head on. The Dominicans realize this and are anxious to work with the United States to take the necessary steps to solve these problems.

The Dominican Republic is a young democracy that has made many advances in democratic freedoms. However, if these are not tied to economic advancement, democracy itself will be undermined. If confirmed I will use my position as Ambassador, utilizing the tools at my disposal and in close consultation with this Committee and Congress, to advocate for policies that foster economic and social justice for the benefit of Dominican society. I want to help the Dominicans improve their education and medical systems to ensure that the poor are not left behind as the Dominican Republic's economy grows.

One issue in the Dominican Republic that ties directly to American values and interests is that of human rights, and in particular the situation of Haitians and people of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic. While acknowledging the

strain that migrants from Haiti place on Dominican social services, if confirmed, I hope to advance a dialogue to address the problems and issues of long time residents whose immigration status is unresolved. In the wake of the earthquake in Haiti on January 12 of this year, President Fernandez and the people of the Dominican Republic have shown that they care deeply about the plight of the Haitian people. A new page in the relationship between these two countries has hopefully been turned. I want to be able to use this historic opportunity to encourage a stronger, more mutually beneficial relationship between these two countries, as well as to encourage solutions to long standing issues faced by people of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic.

I have worked for many years with the NGO community, and I know firsthand how the efforts of these organizations can be one of the most effective forces for advancing our goals. If confirmed, I look forward to working on many of these goals, including increased cooperation on security, improving education and health, strengthening institutions, and economic development. There are NGOs in the Dominican Republic already doing great work in these areas and I would like to strengthen the relationship between the Embassy and those groups. I have a large network of relationships that I will draw on to advance our interests in the Dominican Republic. In particular, I would also like to invite U.S. foundations to

visit the development work the United States is doing in partnership with the Dominicans.

Likewise, one of the major sources of knowledge and capital that I think may be underutilized is that of the Dominican Diaspora in the United States. I have heard anecdotal evidence that Dominicans here in the United States under-invest back in their home country. I would like to engage this community to get a sense of what their concerns are, show them the work our mission is doing in the DR, and determine how we can work together to solve problems of mutual concern.

If confirmed, and with the consent of the Dominican political establishment, I also hope to reach out to political parties to congratulate them on their progress in consolidating democratic ideals with free and fair elections and to offer political party building training or electoral technical assistance. In doing so I would hope to solidify the advances Dominicans themselves have made in the past two decades towards electoral reform.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. Should I be confirmed, I pledge to serve our country and cultivate our strong and valued relationship with the Dominican Republic.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.