

Richard G. Olson, Jr.
Ambassador-designate to the United Arab Emirates
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 23, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Bush's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. I am deeply grateful to President Bush and to Secretary Rice for their confidence in me. If confirmed, I look forward to representing the American people, advancing U.S. goals in the United Arab Emirates, and to working with this Committee and other interested Members of Congress to advance the U.S. agenda.

I have been privileged to serve the American people as a Foreign Service Officer since 1982, having represented them at a series of assignments mostly in the Middle East and Africa. I have been lucky to have shared my life in the Foreign Service with my wife Deborah Jones, who is currently serving as the US Ambassador to Kuwait, and with our two wonderful daughters Ana and Isabella.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee: the United Arab Emirates plays an influential and growing role in the Middle East, and is an important partner for the United States. The U.S. and the UAE enjoy strong bilateral cooperation on a full range of issues including defense, law enforcement, countering terrorist finance, and non-proliferation. Within the region, the UAE has shown leadership by its recent decision to send an Ambassador to Baghdad, and to cancel seven billion dollars worth of Iraqi debt. The UAE has also contributed generously to international efforts to rebuild Afghanistan and given substantial assistance to the people of Lebanon and to the Palestinian Authority.

Our strategic partnership extends to cooperation on political-military issues. We conduct regular bilateral strategic security discussions through the Gulf Security Dialogue and continue to expand our robust military-to-military partnership. For example, the port of Jebel Ali in Dubai is the US Navy's busiest overseas port-of-call.

The UAE is committed to preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; it endorsed the Proliferation Security Initiative in early 2006. In August 2007 the UAE passed a comprehensive export control law empowering the federal authorities to take action against companies or shipments threatening UAE national security. The U.S. has actively engaged Emirati authorities via the Export Control and Related Border Security program to provide training and discussed ongoing issues of bilateral concern via the bilateral Counter Proliferation Task Force.

In April 2008 the UAE issued its white paper on nuclear energy. Noting that peaceful nuclear power is an environmentally promising and commercially competitive approach to meeting its future electricity needs, the paper announced a program to thoroughly evaluate a nuclear power option for the UAE. From a nonproliferation perspective, the paper included several important policy decisions by the UAE including renouncing any intention to develop domestic enrichment or reprocessing capability in favor of long-term external fuel supply arrangements and meeting the highest international standards for nonproliferation, safety, and security.

The U.S. has engaged the UAE with the goal of helping to develop the infrastructure necessary to meet the highest standards for nonproliferation, safety, and security in a nuclear energy program. On April 21, 2008 the U.S. signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on peaceful nuclear cooperation with the UAE. Simultaneously, the UAE endorsed the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

The UAE remains one of the largest export markets for U.S. goods in the Middle East. A diverse array of American companies active in the petroleum, defense, services, education, and health care sectors have found the UAE not only an attractive place to work, but also an excellent location for regional hubs doing business across the Gulf. By investing heavily in its own infrastructure and in attractive opportunities overseas, the UAE is planning for a future in which hydrocarbons will not be the dominant source of wealth for its citizens.

Since 2006 the UAE has voluntarily submitted proposed investments to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States numerous times – in all cases with a successful resolution. Investors from the UAE have put billions of dollars into the American economy. Whether purchasing shares in well known institutions or making investments that garner less attention in the media but are equally important in generating new jobs for Americans, the UAE is a long term strategic investor in the U.S. market. To ensure that the international community remains open to investment the UAE and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority have worked in cooperation with the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the International Monetary Fund to establish a set of voluntary best practices for Sovereign Wealth Funds.

If confirmed as U.S. Ambassador I plan to build on our already solid base of partnership, focusing on our cooperation in the Middle East region, and our partnership on security issues. I will work with Emirati authorities on our common goal of seeing that the UAE's legitimate interest in trade with its neighbors is not put to inappropriate uses, especially with regard to Iran. I will be an active partner with the American private sector to encourage the further growth of our trade relationship. And I plan to devote personal attention to the overarching issue of America's image in Emirati society. As a first step I will listen to Emiratis concerns, because I do believe that when Americans engage with Emiratis on the things that matter to them -- good jobs for their children, a peaceful future, and a sustainable economic future -- then our image improves. And I know from personal experience that Emiratis who come to the United States, especially to study, go back to the UAE with a greater appreciation for our society. We can make no sounder investment to advance our long-term relationship than in the area of educational and cultural exchanges.

As head of the U.S. mission comprising employees of more than 12 different U.S. government agencies and Departments, my first priority will remain at all times the safety and security of the dedicated men and women, American and foreign nationals, at my mission as well as all Americans living and working or traveling to the United Arab Emirates. I will strive to be worthy of the confidence placed in me by the President, Secretary Rice, and the U.S. Congress because ultimately I will be answerable to you and to the American people.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, in closing, if confirmed, I would welcome your insights and views on the UAE and the region, and would look forward to seeing you and your staff members in the UAE. I would also welcome any questions you might have for me today. Thank you.

