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Ambassador-Designate to the Sultanate of Oman
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am honored to have this opportunity to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman. I am deeply humbled by the trust and confidence that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have shown in me through this nomination. If confirmed I will work energetically to protect American citizens, promote American interests, and build on the excellent relations that exist between our two countries.

As a career Foreign Service Officer for almost 30 years, I would not have been able to accomplish the things I have without the support of my Foreign Service family -- my wife, Sandra; our daughter Erika; and our two sons, David and Daniel. We have all welcomed the opportunity to represent and serve our country abroad, having now spent almost two decades serving in Europe and the Middle East. I know that my wife and children are proud of the honor President Obama has bestowed upon me through this nomination; but, likewise, I want to express my pride in them -- and my gratitude to them -- for the contributions and sacrifices that they have made in living the Foreign Service life.

The United States and Oman share a long and dynamic relationship. This bond dates back to 1790, when the Boston brig "Rambler" entered the port of Muscat. Oman was the first Gulf Arab state to sign a bilateral accord with the U.S. and, in 1840, the Omani vessel "Sultana," carrying the first Omani Envoy, dropped anchor in New York harbor. The first American consulate was established in Muscat in 1880, and the first resident American envoy took up his post in 1974. That important relationship continues to this day.

When Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970, Oman was just emerging into the modern age; today, Oman is a modern state with first class infrastructure and educational institutions. In fact, today more Omani women are studying for university degrees than men. English is the language of higher education. Oman has achieved a high degree of good governance and rule of law through the development of strong government institutions, and, increasingly, a robust civil society founded on non-governmental organizations. An independent human rights commission, with representatives from the public and private sectors, was established in 2008.

All Omani citizens over the age of 18 enjoy universal suffrage, and Oman has been a country at the forefront in the region in promoting women's rights and women's participation in political and economic arenas. Omani women run for, and have been elected to, political office. Currently there are three Omani women in the Sultan's cabinet, and 14 women serve in the appointed Majlis al-Doula. Women comprise 40% of Oman's civil service. The State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) has, for many years, supported political empowerment programming for Omani women and if confirmed I look forward to enhancing those efforts.

Oman's cooperation and assistance have been critical in supporting international security efforts in the region. Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and other security operations have benefited from access to Omani facilities and from other support from Oman. Oman is a steadfast ally in defending against extremism and promoting regional stability and security. If confirmed, I will work hard to maintain and deepen this strong security relationship.

Oman's history as a trading empire is based in part on its strategic location on the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. Oman's ports have become some of the most active in the world, and the southern port of Salalah now serves as a pilot post for the Department of Homeland Security's Secure Freight Initiative (SFI). Oman plays a central role in ensuring freedom of navigation in the Straits of Hormuz, a strategic chokepoint through which much of the world's daily oil supplies transit.

Economic and commercial ties between our two countries continue to grow, with bilateral trade increasing from \$1.7 billion in 2006 to \$2.2 billion in 2008. On January 1st of this year, we implemented the U.S. – Oman Free Trade agreement, an agreement that is further enhancing our economic and cultural ties. The agreement includes important labor guarantees, which ensure that Oman's continued economic development benefits all Omanis. This agreement will foster even greater economic and commercial opportunities, and if I am confirmed I will place a high priority on ensuring that U.S. companies have the support and advice they need to benefit from these opportunities.

The important cultural connection between our two countries was demonstrated recently when Oman participated in the Kennedy Center's Arabesque festival. A bi-national group of American and Omani dancers trained for months in Muscat and in Washington under the tutelage of the renowned choreographer Debbie Allen to develop a performance that intricately narrated lessons about our two cultures. The show, "Oman O, man," was presented to sold-out audiences and rave reviews during its run at the festival.

The Middle East Desalination Research Center -- MEDRC -- is headquartered in Muscat and has been chaired by Oman since its inception in 1996. The Middle East is experiencing increasing demand for fresh water along with decreasing supplies. MEDRC's mission is to address the supply issue by promoting the development of region specific desalination and water re-use techniques and capacity. It also continues to support the evolution of peace in the region by bringing together Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Qatari and Omani officials, who along with other donors (Japan, Korea, U.S., Netherlands), work together to solve this shared resource challenge. In his speech in Cairo last month, President Obama noted the importance of creating "centers of excellence" to encourage scientific progress and cooperation; MEDRC truly fits that description.

If confirmed, I further plan to invite Members of Congress and their staffs to visit Oman and to share their expertise and experience with Omanis and others in the country. I have been pleased to support such visits for many years while serving as a Public Affairs Officer at American Embassies and Consulates in Germany, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Let me close by expressing once again my appreciation for this opportunity to appear before you and share my thoughts on the important duties for which President Obama has nominated me. If confirmed, I pledge to carry out these duties to the best of my ability. Thank you. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you might have for me.