

STATEMENT BY JAMES R. KEITH  
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SUBMITTED TO THE  
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
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Madam Chairman, Members of the Committee,

I am deeply honored to appear before you today. It is a privilege to be the President's nominee as the United States Ambassador to Malaysia. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Rice for the trust and confidence they invested in me as the nominee for this position. I am also honored to be in the company of a group of distinguished nominees for important posts in the East Asian and Pacific region.

Madam Chairman, I am a senior member of the Foreign Service with the rank of Minister-Counselor. I have over the course of my 27 years of public service held senior positions at the State Department and the National Security Council in Washington, including as Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs dealing primarily with China. Overseas I was our Designated Chief of Mission and Consul General in Hong Kong and I have served at Embassies in Northeast and Southeast Asia.

Prime among the resources that the Department of State and other agencies and departments have to offer in any Embassy abroad is our people. I look forward, if confirmed, to working with a capable and experienced country team at our Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. We have an active and productive Mission comprising eight U.S. government agencies and departments working together to cement ties between our two nations. We are establishing a one-officer American Presence Post in Kota Kinabalu in Malaysian Borneo and have expanded our Embassy staff in several key areas over recent years to advance our shared security interests. If confirmed, I will take as a priority directing this dedicated team in support of American citizens traveling, working, and residing abroad.

Malaysia is prominent in the region and globally. It will celebrate later this year the fiftieth anniversary of its independence from Britain as well as the fiftieth anniversary of U.S.-Malaysia diplomatic relations. It is

an important voice for key constituencies that matter to the American people. Malaysia is a moderate majority-Muslim democratic state and has successfully managed economic globalization and a multi-faith, multi-ethnic society. It has served over the years in leadership positions in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, among others.

The United States and Malaysia have sometimes had policy differences that required public expression in strong terms. In recent years, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi has set a path forward that promises an increasingly productive relationship and greater congruence between the interests of America and Malaysia. If confirmed, I will devote my energies to improving and strengthening U.S.-Malaysia relations, while openly discussing issues on which we differ.

One example of our differing perspectives involves our respective views of Iran. We remain opposed to foreign investment in Iran's oil and gas sector, as a matter of law and policy. If confirmed, I will continue to make clear our concerns about such investment, and to emphasize that we are vigorously opposed to business as usual with Iran and want other nations to join us in dissuading Teheran from pursuing a nuclear weapons program.

Far too few Malaysians hold positive views of the United States. One of my goals, if confirmed, would be to build on the Embassy's ongoing public outreach throughout the country to provide an accurate basis from which the Malaysian people can form opinions about the American people, our values, and our goals in the world. It will be critical, in this context, for my country team and for me to speak forthrightly about our commitment to fundamental values, including those enunciated in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We want to be Malaysia's essential future partner, and we need to communicate effectively that sentiment to the Government and people of Malaysia. We should deepen and broaden mutual understanding by promoting people-to-people contacts, expanding upon the more than 175,000 Americans who visit each year and increasing from 5,500 the number of Malaysians who study in the United States. These direct

personal interactions represent an invaluable platform for advancing U.S. interests.

Our trade and investment ties, already a key component of the relationship, offer great promise for further development. We are and have been for more than 40 years Malaysia's number one market and we lead the world in total foreign direct investment in Malaysia. Malaysia buys more than \$13 billion of American exports each year. We are seeking to deepen these trade ties even further through a Free Trade Agreement and other mechanisms. Our agenda is ambitious, as befits a relationship with our tenth largest trading partner. We have much work to do, but remain committed to promoting the best interests of all Americans. Agriculture, the environment, labor, intellectual property -- these are complex sectors that will engage our best efforts. If confirmed, I will work closely with our cabinet members and their senior advisors to ensure the most productive possible outcomes for the American people.

One clear area of common interest is the growing cooperation between our officials working on security and law enforcement issues. Southeast Asia is an important front in the war on terror and we depend on Malaysia to be an effective and cooperative player in the region's vital counterterrorism programs. Malaysian authorities have responded vigorously to the threat posed by Jemmah Islamiya and Abu Sayyaf groups, contributing to the security and prosperity of both our nations.

Our bilateral military cooperation is growing and includes exchanges of visits and training, equipment sales, combined exercises, and, increasingly, naval ship visits. Our attention in the region is focused in particular on the Strait of Malacca, an area of vital national interest as it is a major conduit for the world's commercial shipping. We need to assist littoral states through intelligence sharing and capacity building to take on the primary task of protecting the Strait. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with our senior uniformed and civilian military leaders, including my colleagues at the Pacific Command in Hawaii, to advance our security ties with Malaysia.

I would also like to mention the "Heart of Borneo" initiative and related bilateral environmental programs.

The island of Borneo, shared by Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei, is one of the most biologically diverse habitats in the world. We are working with those three governments, NGOs, and others to preserve vast tracts of forest and promote sustainable development in Borneo.

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee, I will not attempt an exhaustive list of every priority in U.S. foreign policy that is embedded in the U.S.-Malaysia relationship. I will commit to you, however, that if confirmed I will do my utmost to ensure that you are kept informed and that your concerns are addressed. If confirmed, I would be delighted to greet you and your staff members in Kuala Lumpur to further our work together to advance the interests of the American people.

I am convinced our longstanding relationship with the Malaysian people will continue to flourish in the years ahead. If confirmed by the Senate I will commit myself to promoting U.S. interests by deepening ties to the leadership and people of Malaysia to the benefit of both our nations.

Thank you again for granting me the honor of appearing before you today. I would be pleased to respond to your questions.