

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**Opening Statement**  
**Ambassador William J. Burns**  
**April 28, 2008**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as President Bush's nominee to become Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Rice for their confidence in me, and in our diplomatic service, in which I am proud to have served for the last 26 years. If confirmed, I will do my best to live up to their trust, and to work closely with all of you on this Committee, as I have throughout my career.

With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by expressing deep appreciation to my family -- my wife, Lisa, and daughter, Sarah, who are still in Moscow, and my daughter, Lizzy, now in the midst of her exams at Duke University. As in so many Foreign Service families around the world, their love and sacrifice are a very large part of why I am here today. I can never repay them adequately.

This is the fourth time, Mr. Chairman, that I have appeared before this Committee for confirmation. I approach this new challenge with considerable humility; with great respect for Nick Burns, Marc Grossman, Tom Pickering, and all those who have come before me; with an abiding commitment to public service; with faith in the power of clear-eyed diplomacy in the pursuit of American interests and human freedoms; and with few illusions about the complicated world around us.

It is a world with no shortage of troubles, but also plenty of opportunities for creative and determined American leadership. It is a world which faces the spreading dangers of weapons of mass destruction; new and more malignant forms of terrorism; unresolved regional and sectarian conflicts; failed and failing states; global economic dislocation; and transnational health, energy, illegal narcotics, and environmental concerns. It is a world in which American vision and leadership are essential in crafting relations with emergent and resurgent Great Powers, and deepening their stake in global institutions and a stable international system.

It is a world in which other people and other societies will always have their own realities, not always hospitable to ours. That doesn't mean we have to accept those perspectives or agree with them or indulge them, but it does mean that understanding them is the starting point for sensible policy. It is a world in which a little modesty in the pursuit of American interests is often a good thing, and in which there's still no substitute for setting careful priorities, and connecting means to ends.

But it is also a world in which the power of our example and our generosity of spirit can open the door to profound advances, as President Bush has shown in his historic initiative against HIV-AIDS in Africa. It is a world in which our leadership should serve as a catalyst for making common cause with others. Nowhere is that more true today than in the broader Middle East, where it is hugely important to build on the Annapolis Conference and realize the promise of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and where we must strengthen regional and international support for a better future for Afghanistan and Iraq.

It is a world, as Secretary Rice has said, in which America has no permanent enemies, and in which tough-minded engagement of our adversaries, such as North Korea and Iran, is a mark of strength and confidence, not weakness. And it is a world, as Secretary Gates has argued, in which the many instruments of American "soft power" ought to be expanded alongside the tools of hard power.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward, if confirmed, to assisting Secretary Rice and Deputy Secretary Negroponte in coordinating our diplomacy across the major regions of the globe, and towards the alliances and international organizations which are so important to U.S. national security. I will draw as best I can on my experience in Russia and the Middle East, two regions of the world which are rarely dull but always central to American interests. I will work hard with my friends and colleagues in other agencies to promote an effective policy process. And I will also wholeheartedly support Secretary Rice's efforts, building on the work of Colin Powell, to transform and strengthen America's diplomatic capabilities for the new century before us. Taking care of our people -- of the members of the Foreign and Civil Services and the Foreign Service Nationals who serve our country with such dedication and courage in so many hard places around the world -- is not only the right thing to do, but also a powerful contribution to America's best interests.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for your consideration. I know the period ahead is an important one, with a political transition looming in our country, in a world

which doesn't stop for our political processes. I'll do all I can, if confirmed, to work with all of you to help meet the formidable challenges before us.