

Testimony of Thomas Armbruster
Ambassador-Designate to the Republic of the Marshall Islands
Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 18, 2012

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Barrasso, Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). I am thankful to President Obama and Secretary Clinton for the confidence shown in me by this nomination. If confirmed, I would welcome the chance to work with you, this Committee, and other Members of Congress to advance American interests in the Pacific.

I would like to introduce my wife Kathy and son Bryan, who along with our daughter Kalia, have traveled every step of my career path from Hawaii to Finland to Cuba, Russia, Mexico, Tajikistan, and New York serving the United States in the Foreign Service.

The Marshall Islands is a key partner in the United States' deepening commitment to the Pacific. Secretary Clinton said: "One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will be to lock in a substantially increased investment -- diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise -- in the Asia-Pacific region."

The United States and the Marshall Islands have a close and special relationship dating back to the end of the Second World War, when the Marshall Islands became part of the U.N. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands under the administration of the United States. In 1986, the Marshall Islands and the United States signed the Compact of Free Association and the RMI became an independent state. This Compact, which was amended in 2004 to extend economic assistance for an additional 20 years, provides the framework for much of our bilateral relationship. Under the Compact, citizens of the RMI can live, study, and work in the United States without a visa. The Compact obliges the two countries to consult on matters of foreign policy, and the RMI government has an excellent voting affinity with the United States in the United Nations, sharing our positions on many contentious issues, including on human rights and Israel.

Mutual security of our nations is an underlying element of the special relationship between the United States and the Republic of Marshall Islands. Under the Compact the United States has committed to defend the Marshall Islands as if it were part of our own territory, and the RMI has no military of its own. Marshallese citizens serve in our armed forces, volunteering at a higher rate than citizens from any individual state. Jefferson Bobo was the first Marshallese cadet to graduate from the Coast Guard Academy in May 2011. He will do his part to defend global peace and security, in peacekeeping missions, in U.S.-led combat

operations, and in patrolling the world's waterways. If confirmed, I will work closely with the host government and the Marshallese people to ensure such mutual benefits of our close relationship are widely recognized.

The United States also enjoys complete access to Marshallese ports, airports, and airspace, a vital asset for our defense and security needs. The Marshall Islands hosts the U.S. Army's Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site on Kwajalein (known as USAKA). The base is the country's second largest employer, second only to government services. I met with General Formica and his talented and dedicated team at the Space and Missile Defense Command Headquarters in Huntsville and know how important their work is. The test site plays a significant role in the U.S. missile defense research, development, and testing network. It is used to monitor foreign launches and provide deep-space tracking and is an ideal near-equator launch site for satellites. Under the Amended Compact, the United States has access to Kwajalein through 2066 with the option to extend until 2086. Continued access is important, but as important is a good relationship with the Marshallese. If confirmed, I will work to maintain the strong relationship between USAKA and the Marshall Islands government and to promote USAKA's beneficial role for affiliated Marshallese communities.

The United States and the Marshall Islands also have an important economic relationship. To help achieve the Compact goal of economic self-sufficiency, the

United States will provide the Government of the RMI over \$60 million a year in economic assistance through FY 2023. The majority of this assistance is provided as grants directed toward six sectors: health, education, infrastructure to support health and education, public sector capacity building, private sector development and the environment. In addition, U.S. federal agencies operate more than 20 different government programs in the Marshall Islands. Another very important aspect of the Compact is a jointly-managed Trust Fund that will serve as a source of income for the Marshall Islands after annual grant assistance expires in 2023. If confirmed, I will promote economic development and strongly advocate that the Marshallese work vigorously toward economic self-sufficiency, which is one of the primary goals of the Compact, as Amended.

Maintaining a solid partnership requires work on both sides. Education is a priority sector under the Amended Compact, but more has to be done to prepare young Marshallese for today's global economy. Despite our aid every year, Marshallese citizens are struggling with health issues, unemployment, and social problems. It is in our interest to help the Marshall Islands become more self-reliant and retain their talented and ambitious citizens to foster development and economic growth at home. As I mentioned, many U.S. government agencies are working to advance those goals. If confirmed, I intend to do everything I can to ensure that our programs are effective in achieving their objectives and will ensure

that the interagency is also working harmoniously in a “whole of government approach.”

If confirmed, I will draw on my experiences from postings throughout the world to work cooperatively with Marshallese officials and society. For example, joint efforts like the Border Liaison Mechanism that I co-chaired with my Mexican counterpart were effective in coordinating policy. In Moscow, as nuclear affairs officer, I coordinated with a range of U.S. agencies to safeguard Russia’s nuclear materials. And in negotiating an emergency response agreement with Russia, I forged a close relationship with the Russian negotiator to have that agreement signed and in force to the benefit of both countries.

If confirmed, I will work closely with colleagues in other Pacific countries to advance U.S. interests regionally. In that spirit I led a counternarcotics team from Tajikistan to Kabul and a business delegation to Konduz, Afghanistan, to strengthen regional ties to the benefit of the United States in Central Asia. Furthering citizen services, I currently serve as an auxiliary police officer with the New York Police Department in Manhattan and I have assisted Americans in prison in Cuba, Mexico, and Russia.

If confirmed, my interagency experience will be a critical asset in the RMI, where so many domestic federal agencies— such as the U.S. Postal Service, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the National Weather Service – operate side-

by-side with foreign affairs and defense colleagues. If confirmed, I will work closely with these agencies, and particularly with the Department of the Interior, which has primary responsibility for implementing the Compact's economic provisions, to ensure that assistance efforts are appropriately coordinated and implemented with transparency and accountability.

Working in several Embassies around the world, I know how critical local staff is to our success. Our mission in the Marshall Islands depends, not just on the written text of the Compact of Free Association, but also on creating a bilateral relationship based on partnership and mutual respect between Marshallese and the American people. The Marshallese are great Pacific navigators and I'm sure we can chart a course together. If confirmed, I will work hard to ensure that my staff has the resources and support it needs to meet our mission in the Marshall Islands. I would like to continue the great work Ambassador Martha Campbell is doing with her staff of 39 officers, local staff, and guards.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination. I welcome any questions you may have.