

Remarks to the Lion's Club of Curacao, September 19, 2013

Thank you very much, Ivan, for that kind introduction, and many thanks to Lion's President Dave Liqui-Lung for inviting me today.

It's a privilege to speak this afternoon to the Lion's Club of Curacao. My father was an active member of the Lion's Club for several decades. Growing up, I knew the Lion's motto was "We Serve."

Little did I know, however, that there are over 1.3 million members in 46,000 clubs located in 207 countries and geographic worldwide.

Each of the Lion's Clubs – in every part of the world -- "give back" through community service. This takes many forms – fundraising, service projects and other outreach initiatives – that truly make a difference to local communities and their people, particularly the less fortunate.

More broadly, "giving back" is also a goal that the people of the United States and the people of Curacao embrace every day, with unwavering commitment.

Dating back to 1793, the U.S. Consulate in Curacao is one of my country's oldest diplomatic missions in the world.

And with good reason, when you look back at the active commercial relations that have existed between the southern Caribbean and the United States, virtually since our independence as a nation.

I recently read a fascinating biography of Leonard Burlington Smith, who after many years of active commercial involvement with Curacao – and residency here, was appointed as U.S. Consul in 1884 by President Chester Arthur.

Despite the passage of time, I've been struck by a number of similarities between the opportunities Leonard Smith encountered when he served on the island in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and those of today.

I arrived here less than three months ago, and feel truly privileged to have this opportunity to represent my country to the government and people of Curacao, as well as to Aruba, Bonaire, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius, and Saba.

In this short period of time, I have learned a great deal and have appreciated the warm hospitality I've experienced as I carry out my official duties here.

One of the most visible manifestations of the long friendship between Curacao and the United States is the place where I wake up each morning – Roosevelt House.

As many of you know – but as a surprising number of people here today don't realize – this ideally situated piece of property looking out over Punda and the Caribbean Sea and the beautiful house that is constructed on it were a gift in 1950 of the local government in expression of their gratitude for the protection the U.S. military provided in these waters during World War II.

As I make – on foot – the commute – the shortest I will ever have in my life – from the house to what is now the office, I reflect on what is also your motto: “We serve.”

I and my American and local colleagues in the Consulate are here to serve – that is, to sustain and to fortify the relationship between the United States and the Dutch Caribbean for the benefit of the peoples of both.

During my first three months as Consul General in Curacao, I have been privileged to meet a large number of people in your community in the fields of government, business, law enforcement, education, the media, the arts, civil society, and social service.

I have been struck by their commitment to nation building and to the economic and social betterment of the people of this island.

Just yesterday, I met at Roosevelt House with eight leaders of non-governmental organizations that are working in such areas as the Red Cross, services for those in the community who are disabled and elderly, and those who suffer from substance abuse. Others are working to build volunteer networks, while still others are working in support of women's rights.

I was inspired by their passionate commitment to helping to provide a better life for all members of society – again, the goal to which the Lion's Club is dedicated.

I'd like to speak now about the principal objectives of the government of the United States in Curacao -- objectives that we share in common with your government and that we work together in partnership to achieve.

The first is to promote security by disrupting organizations and individuals engaged in drug trafficking and money laundering, as well as in trafficking in persons.

This effort comprises many U.S. government agencies, which are in frequent – and in some cases daily – contact – with your government. They include the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice, to name just a few.

DEA maintains a robust presence at the U.S. Consulate and its dedicated personnel work closely and effectively with law enforcement officials on Curacao and elsewhere in the Dutch Caribbean.

The U.S. Forward Operating Location at Hato International Airport makes an important contribution to our shared goal of disrupting the flow of illegal narcotics through the region.

The personnel aboard the aircraft operating from the FOL coordinate with partner nations throughout the Caribbean and pass information to those governments, thereby assisting in locating and interdicting vessels that are transporting drugs.

We are deeply grateful to the government of Curacao for hosting the Forward Operating Location.

The men and women assigned to the FOL also engage in a large number of volunteer activities that benefit the local community.

And the FOL is also an important source of revenue for Curacao, accounting for an estimated \$110 million per year in expenditure on the local economy.

Second, the U.S. Consulate works closely with Curacao and the other islands of the Dutch Caribbean in providing assistance, when needed, to the over three million American citizens who visit these islands each year, whether for business or leisure.

In addition, while Dutch passport holders generally do not require visas for travel to the United States, the consulate issues visas to those categories of visitors, such as students, who do require a visa.

Third, we are committed to encouraging more trade and investment between Curacao, as well as the rest of the Dutch Caribbean, and the United States.

Finally, the Consulate works to increase the already strong people-to-people ties between the United States and Curacao in such areas as education and scientific research.

There is a long tradition of study in the United States by residents of the island. There is no better way to deepen one's insight into and understanding of another country and its people than study abroad.

We welcome the government of Curacao's recent decision to extend financial support – through partial scholarships and low interest loans – to young people who wish to study in other countries in this hemisphere.

Last year, your government provided financial assistance for 44 students to study in the United States. This year, that number increased to nearly new 100 students, and the number is expected to grow significantly higher in 2014.

I had an opportunity last month to meet with many of these young people and their families before the students left for the United States. The students were very excited about the experience of studying and living on American campuses that was about to unfold.

Scientific collaboration is another area that brings our people closer together. For example, the Smithsonian Institution's Deep Reef Observation Project is a joint Curacao-U.S. undertaking to

learn more about biodiversity and climate change, with the goal of protecting the deep reefs of your beautiful coastline.

Last month, we were pleased to welcome the director of the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History to Curacao when he came to see this exciting project in action.

In sum, the United States and Curacao have an ambitious and important agenda. We are fortunate that there is abundant commitment in both countries to achieving these shared objectives.

Thank you for inviting me today. And congratulations to the Lion's Club of Curacao for its strong commitment to giving back to the local community.

If there is time, I'd be pleased to take a few questions.