

**Remarks by Chargé D'Affairs David Wolfe
At Embassy's Election Night Watch
Hyatt Regency, Port of Spain
November 6, 2012**

Salutations

Welcome **everyone**, to a night which **many of us** have waited a **long time for**.

A night that many Americans have been looking forward to with **both hope** and **anxiety**.

A night when the course of **the next four years of American history** will be decided.

But tonight is also **tragic** for **many Americans** who have **lost loved ones** in Hurricane Sandy. And, although the country is **working hard** to help them, **many more** are without **heat or electricity** more than a week after the storm.

Let us take a **moment to remember them** in our prayers.

Thank you.

Since the first Republican primary elections **this January**, the American people have seen candidates **rise** and **fall**, polls go **up** and **down**, heard **speeches, sound bites, commentary, commercials** and several hours of head-to-head political **debates**.

Oceans of **ink** and forests of **paper** have been put to use analyzing **every aspect** of this race.

One thing **is for sure**, whoever wins tonight, whatever happens, no one can say there was **not enough** discussion or thought.

There is a lot **at stake** tonight, not only is there the **Presidential race**, but all **435** members of the **House of Representatives** and **one third** of the **U.S. Senate** are up for election.

The American people will **not only** decide who their president will be, they will decide on the **legislators** the president will need **to work with** to enact his agenda.

And if that's not enough there are **several governor's** races and hundreds of races for **state and local governments** as well as ballot initiatives and **referendums**.

Quite a lot for one night.

Although today is **election day**, many Americans **have already** cast their votes.

Over the last few years we have seen **many states** experiment with ways to **make voting easier** for our complex lives.

Americans have voted by **mail**, by **fax** and **email**.

Many have taken advantage of **early voting** to cast their ballot at their **local polling place** in the days and weeks before the election.

These votes have been duly recorded and **will be counted** tonight along with the rest.

In areas **still without power**, state and local governments have worked to **issue and collect paper ballots** to ensure that **every American** has the chance to vote **in this critical election**.

Tonight we will **not see one** national election for the President but **51 elections** held in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Each state sets **its own method** of voting, **decides the hours** the polls are open, and has its own **registration system**.

These systems reflect the character of **each** state.

For example some states allow for days or weeks of **early voting**, since voters may live some distance from the polls.

Others allow anyone who wishes to vote by **mail**.

But some states only allow people to vote **in person**, at a designated **polling place**.

This **decentralized** system is also why we will hear a lot of talk about **electoral college** and **battleground states**.

When the United States was a young nation, when **13 colonies** came together to form **one country**, there was a fear that **larger states** would be able to impose their will on the **smaller states**.

So a system was created where the President would be chosen by **electors**.

Each state has **one elector** for **each vote** it has in Congress.

As a result even the **smallest states** are guaranteed **three votes**.

At least one for the House of Representatives which is determined by **population**.

Plus two for the two senators **each state has**.

This gives small states **more power** than a system based solely on **population** would.

The two candidates tonight are looking to win **enough popular votes in enough states** to get a majority in the Electoral College.

Winning **enough states** to command **270 Electoral College** votes out of 538 **will win** the Presidential election.

This system, **like all** democratic systems, was the product of a **compromise**.

It is complicated and is **sometimes criticized** as undemocratic since a candidate can win the Electoral College without winning the majority of the popular vote.

This happened as recently as the year 2000 when George W Bush won the election even though Al Gore won the popular vote.

But it has **endured** more than 200 years because it **requires** candidates to pay attention to **every state** rather than overlook **the smaller ones**.

It also divides an election in our **vast country** into 51 smaller, **more manageable** elections.

There are sometimes calls to **reform** or **abolish** the Electoral College, but **here and now** in 2012 this is the system **both candidates** know they are **bound by**.

In this year of **shifts** and **reversals**, some people have even wondered if we could see **a tie** in the Electoral College, in which case **the Constitution** requires that **Congress** vote to choose the President and Vice President.

The battleground states, according to **historical** and polling data, can support **either** the **Republicans** or **Democrats**.

Both candidates have **focused** their efforts in these states, leading some voters to complain of overload, as **too many** TV commercials, emails and phone calls blanket the state.

Two of the largest battleground states are **Florida**, a state where many of us have friends and relatives, and **Ohio** where Trinidadian reporter Juhel (JEWEL) Browne is covering the election as part of a U.S.-sponsored reporting tour.

As the results come in, **state-by-state**, we'll all be paying attention to how these **battleground states** go.

Once the election is over, **regardless** of who wins, we will start to hear who the President is choosing for his new team.

Even if President Obama is reelected there will be **many changes**. Secretary of State Hilary Rodham **Clinton**, for example, announced she will **step down** after the election.

And, as we all know, Ambassador **Welters** left last week.

So in the next few weeks and months look for announcements from the President about **new** Cabinet Secretaries, agency heads, and of course, new **Ambassadors**.

I **can't predict** who will win tonight, but I can **promise** this will be a **fascinating** evening as, **despite** a devastating hurricane, one of the world's **largest** and **oldest** democracies chooses its leadership.

Thank you, and I hope **we all** enjoy the rest of the evening.