

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. Ambassador to Suriname reflects on South Dakota's State Partnership Program

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SDNG Public Affairs

PARAMARIBO, Suriname – Ambassador John R. Nay, the 13th U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Suriname, is in his final days in U.S. Embassy in Paramaribo, Suriname. Ambassador Nay and his wife, Judith, will leave the South American country on Labor Day and head back to the United States where he will next serve as a diplomat in residence at the University of Illinois in Chicago and will travel to seven other universities in the region to promote Foreign Service as a career choice.

Since arriving in Suriname on Sept. 28, 2009, Ambassador Nay has contributed greatly to the success of the South Dakota National Guard's State Partnership Program with Suriname.

The National Guard's 65-nation State Partnership Program provides unique partnership capacity-building capabilities to combatant commanders through partnerships between U.S. states, territories, and the District of Columbia and foreign countries.

Senior leaders from the South Dakota National Guard were able to make a trip to Suriname in Ambassador's final week in office to personally thank him for his service and dedication to the partnership throughout his tenure.

I had the opportunity to sit down with Ambassador Nay and see what kind of impression the State Partnership Program and working alongside South Dakota National Guard Soldiers and Airmen had left.

What was your first experience in working with members of the South Dakota National Guard through the SPP?

I had heard about the State Partnership Program and its success before arriving here. When I first heard about the partnership with South Dakota I wondered 'Why Suriname and South Dakota?' after all, Suriname is in an equatorial climate, not just tropical, but nearly on the equator. South Dakota's climate is obviously very, very different. But that actually, as I learned more about it, is a good thing for South Dakota National Guardsmen and women. When they have to deploy abroad, sometimes in a military situation, let's say to Afghanistan or Iraq, they are not deploying

to a South Dakota climate. If they have experience in all climates, in a broad range of settings, including tropical heat and a tropical rain forest and all of the heat that goes with that, they are better prepared to deal with various climates.

What value do you feel the SPP brings to the U.S. Embassy in Suriname?

“This is a program that is great for any embassy and any bi-lateral relationship, but it is particularly valuable in the relationship with small countries and for small embassies. And ours is a comparatively small embassy compared to many of the U.S. embassies we have around the world. We have limited personnel and the host government sees them repeatedly. Bringing in additional personnel from the State Partnership Program, in this case South Dakota, winds up bringing a whole additional group with a wide range of expertise who can have their own impact on that bi-lateral relationship, bring advice, training and concrete skills that they can share that we in our small embassy simply do not have.

Why is the National Guard a good fit for the SPP?

From the host country bi-lateral relationship point of view, one of the things that we always want to do is to help explain America to the foreign country where we work. Again, we have a limited number of people to do it. Bringing in members of the National Guard to work with people here just expands that horizon hugely. They get to see a wide range of Americans and members of the National Guard are not usually full-time Soldiers and they bring in civilian expertise as well.

For example, we had a subject matter expert exchange on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. South Dakota was able to bring educational experts, experts on working with underprivileged, people who have worked with counter drug usage, and so on. They go out and meet with a wide range of people from Suriname, who I probably would not meet, and members of this embassy probably might not meet, if you were not coming. It ends up expanding the United States’ opportunity to show what we’re about and to help bring about positive change in all these areas that we care about.

How does the National Guard’s involvement in the SPP benefit the Soldiers and Airmen?

From the National Guard point of view, it gives a broadening experience to members of the National Guard. It gives them a chance to use their skills in different settings that they would not be able to use them in, on their home turf. I think it probably brings a sense of satisfaction while providing a direct training benefit. They can strengthen their own skills, just by using them, so when they are out working with Surinamers, building clinics, building schools, again, they are providing training, but when you provide training it often strengthens your own talents in that area.

What subject-matter-expert exchange that took place in Suriname stands out the most for you?

Many valuable exchanges took place, all of which added value to both Suriname and South Dakota, ranging from subjects like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, anti-drug training, women in the military and training in the rain forest, but the New Horizons exercise stands out the most. As I recall, there were more than one hundred South Dakotans down here. In terms of impact in both directions, that stands out the most in my memory. South Dakotans were working everyday, in the heat, with Surinamers. And being able to expose that many members of the South Dakota

National Guard to Suriname was a great opportunity. We still have the fruits of that mission, with plaques on clinics and schools that were constructed and refurbished stating they were done by the U.S. military in cooperation with Suriname clinics. We had multiple public affairs events, unveilings sequentially of things that had been completed and believe me, they received great media coverage and public recognition that summer (July 2011).

What subject-matter-expert exchange that took place in South Dakota stands out the most for you?

In June of 2011, I was able to accompany Suriname's Minister of Defense, Chief of Defense and their Chief of Training Programs on a trip to South Dakota. It was a great opportunity to show them all that the National Guard does. We had been trying to help them increase and strengthen their military planning for preparedness for emergencies. And coincidentally, when the trip happened, South Dakota was facing a major flood emergency. That was really unfortunate that you had that emergency, but it worked out in such a way that the Minister of Defense and Chief of Defense got to see S.D. National Guardsmen and women actually handling a real emergency, see South Dakota's Emergency Operations Center coordinating things from all over the state, see the sandbagging operations in Pierre and meet with Governor Daugaard. I think because Suriname had some flooding issues in the past, they were really impressed with that whole operation. We definitely regret that South Dakota had that flood emergency but we were fortunate to make the trip at the time to see how well South Dakota handled it.

Why do think Suriname and South Dakota have such a successful relationship?

It has success because it has had engaged, interested, committed leadership. I think that we in the embassy have been able to be helpful too. Having a South Dakota National Guardsmen here at the embassy has helped make sure things kept moving forward. We meet with him regularly, as we do with all of our military folks here. I have been really committed to being active and participating and encouraging this relationship and I've enjoyed doing it. And let me say the Surinamers have also really appreciated it. The Minister of Defense makes time for us, the other ministers in the cabinet are interested, the district commissioners where South Dakota National Guardsmen and women have worked always came out, the country here appreciates it and it has made a positive contribution to our relationship. But really, the first credit has to go to the South Dakota National Guardsmen who make sure this keep moving forward. Lt. Col. John Weber (South Dakota National Guard State Partnership Program director) has made sure that we continue to do this very actively. Before him, there were others who were also actively engaged, but in all honesty the South Dakotans really deserve the biggest share of the credit.

In your experience are surrounding countries experiencing the same success through their SPP?

One probably always likes to think the program one sees up close is the best, but it is an outstanding program. I have talked to a number of our other ambassadors around the Caribbean, Central America and Latin America. Some of their programs are also quite active; and some are less active. I would say the number one factor is how interested and how committed the state is where that National Guard is located. An embassy winds up busy on a lot of things and if the state doesn't stay active, the program can begin to decline. I've known a couple of other cases where there is a program, but it is a program in name, and isn't very active. Believe me, I've become a big fan of the South Dakota program.

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U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Suriname John R. Nay. (Courtesy photo) (RELEASED)



11110615-A-FO377-030: Brig. Gen. Jeff Marlette (left), assistant adjutant general of the South Dakota Army National Guard, welcomes Col. Hedwig Gilaard, Suriname Chief of Armed Forces, to Camp Rapid in Rapid City, S.D., as U.S. Ambassador to Suriname Mr. John Nay looks on Wednesday, June 15, 2011. The dignitaries were shown various military training associated with the annual Golden Coyote training exercise, which brought 2,100 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen from across the U.S. to the Black Hills for the two-week training event. (SDNG photo by OC Chad Carlson) (RELEASED)



11110615-A-FO377-106: (Left to right) South Dakota National Guard's Maj. Shelby Dreyer, intelligence operations specialist, briefs Mr. John Nay, U.S. Ambassador to Suriname, Mr. Lamure Latour, Suriname Minister of Defense, Cdr. Hiram Johnson, Military Liaison Officer at the U.S. Embassy, Lt. Col. Johnny Antonius, Suriname Strategic Planning and Education and Col. Hedwig Gilaard, Suriname Chief of Armed Forces, on the South Dakota National Guard's Joint Operations Center at Camp Rapid in Rapid City, S.D., Wednesday, June 15, 2011. (SDNG photo by OC Chad Carlson) (RELEASED)



110702-F-TF102-047: Tech Sgt. Shawn Petermann, 114th Fighter Wing Civil Engineer Squadron, South Dakota Air National Guard, takes a break to give a soccer ball and football to children who live next door to a clinic July 2, 2011, in Paramaribo, Suriname. Members of the 114th Fighter Wing are constructing a clinic in the Commewijne district of Suriname in support of exercise New Horizons. (Air Force Photo by Master Sgt. Chris Stewart) (RELEASED)



120613-A-DZ410-003: Suriname Army military police member Sgt. 1st Class Rashkoemar Mahangoe demonstrates restraint techniques on his partner Sgt. 1st Class Cyron Doemoeng, as observed by Sgt. Boyd Reiwnitz (center) of the 235th Military Police Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, during the Golden Coyote exercise in Rapid City, S.D., June 13, 2012. Suriname soldiers exchanged ideas with the 235th during a Subject Matter Expert Exchange. (SDNG photo by Sgt. Charles Butler) (RELEASED)

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