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New U.S. Envoy Seeks to Reassure

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By **JEREMY PAGE**

BEIJING—In his first public appearance as the new U.S. ambassador to China, Gary Locke sought to reassure Beijing that its dollar assets are safe and that Washington is committed to "getting our fiscal house in order."

Mr. Locke, a 61-year-old former U.S. commerce secretary who is the first Chinese-American to take over the Beijing embassy, also called for China and the U.S. to join forces to solve some of the world's most pressing problems.



Agence France-Presse/Getty Images

U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke with his wife and three children in Beijing on Sunday. He called for joint efforts to solve global problems.

"We note that over the last several days more people are buying U.S. Treasuries," Mr. Locke, flanked by his wife and three children, told reporters in front of the ambassador's residence in Beijing. "So it's a clear indication that investment in the United States is safe, secure and that the economy, while having its challenges, is still strong."


China is the U.S.'s biggest foreign creditor, and Chinese state media have accused Washington of fiscal recklessness since Standard & Poor's cut its credit rating for long-term U.S. debt in early August.

Broader relations have stabilized since a series of disputes last year over issues including U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, China's human-rights record, and U.S. demands that Beijing allow the Chinese currency, the

renminbi, to appreciate. But tensions have risen again in recent weeks over questions including China's territorial claims in the South China Sea and Beijing's development of new weaponry, including an aircraft carrier that ended its first sea trials Sunday.

Mr. Locke's first major task will be to oversee a visit by Vice President Joe Biden, who arrives in Beijing on Wednesday for talks with Chinese leaders, including Vice President Xi Jinping. Mr. Xi is expected to take over as Communist Party chief next year and as president in 2013.

The Beijing ambassadorship is one of the highest-profile U.S. diplomatic posts. Mr. Locke

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succeeds Jon Huntsman, who was popular in China because of his Chinese language skills and media-friendly manner but who left Beijing in April to seek the Republican presidential nomination.

Like Mr. Huntsman, Mr. Locke had many dealings with China in his previous roles, most importantly over the last two years as commerce secretary, when he handled regular conflicts with Beijing over trade and currency. Mr. Locke doesn't speak Mandarin, however.

As ambassador, he has pledged to continue pressing Beijing to allow the renminbi to appreciate further, to crack down on piracy of American products, and to open the Chinese market to more U.S. goods and services.

In his debut appearance in China, however, he sought to gloss over such differences. "Certainly there are many challenges facing both China and America," he said. "But if our people, our businesspeople, our scientists, our students can really join together, we can solve not just the challenges and problems facing each of our countries, we can actually solve many of the problems facing the entire world."

Mr. Locke's appointment has generated considerable interest in China because of his Chinese ancestry: He was born in Washington state to parents who had both emigrated from China.

Even before arriving in Beijing, Mr. Locke caused a minor sensation when pictures were widely circulated online of him trying to buy a cup of coffee with a coupon at the Seattle airport. Netizens praised him for carrying his own bags and for not being surrounded by security guards.

Asked about the pictures, and about how he planned to use the Internet to communicate with Chinese people, he said: "We look forward to using all forms of communications, including blogging and the electronic media."

In his initial remarks, Mr. Locke said: "On a personal level, I am both humbled and honored to stand here before you as a child of Chinese immigrants representing America, the land of my birth, and the American values my family holds dear.

"I can only imagine just how proud my dad, Jimmy, who passed away in January, would be for his son to be the first Chinese-American to represent the United States in the land of his and my mother's birth."

Write to Jeremy Page at jeremy.page@wsj.com

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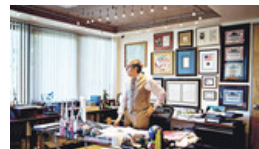
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