

Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin and distinguished members of this committee, it is an honor to have been nominated by President Bush to serve as the Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) in the Rural Development Mission Area at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I am further humbled by the experience of appearing before this Committee. Like you, agriculture has been vitally important to my family, my livelihood and my community for many years.

With me today is my wife, Mary. Next month, we celebrate our 41st wedding anniversary. Mary and I have two adult children. Our son lives in Baltimore and our daughter in Atlanta. Mary and I live in rural Jenkins County, Georgia near the town of Millen. We moved there 37 years ago to help preserve Mary's family farm after her father became seriously ill.

I was born in Alabama and raised in the small southeast Alabama town of Geneva. After high school, I left home to attend the University of Alabama, where I earned a degree in Business Administration. I also served in the Alabama Army National Guard for over eight years, including six months on active duty.

The value of hard work was instilled in me at a young age. As early as age 10, I began helping my father in his small farm equipment business, where I worked assembling implements and as a mechanic's helper. Since that time, I have had very few periods in my life when I didn't earn a paycheck.

Over the course of my career, I gained experience in the corporate world and as a small business owner. My corporate experience includes work in sales and management for a large electrical distribution equipment manufacturer and financial consulting in the brokerage division of a large insurance company. Then, after a period as marketing director for the Georgia Electric Membership Corporation (GEMC), I decided to start my own business in the nearby town of Waynesboro, Georgia.

Over 28 years ago, I established an agricultural irrigation company that specialized in the design, sale, installation and service of center pivot irrigation. Over time, my business expanded to include construction of agricultural and commercial steel buildings. While growing my business, I was asked to serve on the dealer council of a steel buildings manufacturer and a center pivot irrigation equipment company. After more than 20 years, I sold the business. The new owners asked me to remain as a consultant. I continued to consult for that company and several other companies until my nomination by the President.

In addition to my endeavors as a small business owner, I was also involved in various community development activities in my county and beyond. I was a founding member of the board of directors of a community bank, and I was serving as the chairman of the board when we sold to a larger bank that was dedicated to serving rural communities. I remained on the board of the merged holding company until my nomination.

In 1976, I was elected to serve on the board of my local rural electric cooperative, and I remained on the board for 25 years. During that time, I served two terms as an officer and two terms as president. The board of my local co-op elected me to represent the co-op on the board of GEMC. I served as an officer and as president of that association until the board elected me

to represent Georgia on the board of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

I served 16 years on the NRECA board. Six of those years I served as an officer, including two as the president. As president of NRECA, I served on the board of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC), a supplemental finance cooperative owned by the members.

If I am confirmed as the Administrator of RUS, it will be the culmination of my life experiences and my service to rural America.

The Rural Utilities Service and its predecessor agencies have earned a unique place in American history. By combining Federal resources with the ingenuity of the American people, RUS has brought reliable electricity, clear telecommunications and safe drinking water to rural America.

Today, our nation is facing new challenges, and there is still much more work to be done. Under the leadership of Secretary Johanns and Undersecretary Dorr, I believe USDA Rural Development has a unique opportunity to make major contributions to the immediate and long-term future of rural America. If confirmed, I will use my experience as a small business owner and industry leader to ensure that RUS delivers its programs as efficiently as possible, so we can have the maximum impact on the lives of rural Americans in communities throughout the country.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, if I am confirmed to this position, I will work with each of you to earn your respect and your support as we work together to strengthen rural America.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.