

**Opening Statement of Robert Bonnie Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry**

Remarks as Prepared

Thank you, Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman and members of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be with you today and for your consideration of my nomination. I want to thank my wife, Julie Gomena and my daughter Lilly Bonnie for all their love and support. I want to thank my mother, Nina Bonnie, and my brother Shelby for their love and encouragement. And, I want to acknowledge my father, Ned Bonnie, who I know would be proud if he were with us today.

I am honored to have been nominated by President Biden to serve as Under Secretary of Agriculture for Farm Production and Conservation at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. And, I'm honored to have the opportunity, if confirmed, to work again with Secretary Vilsack on the opportunities and challenges facing American agriculture.

I have been around working lands my whole life. I grew up on a farm in Kentucky. And, while my father was a lawyer, we had a dairy when I was a young child and later a herd of shorthorn cattle. We grew corn, wheat and hay and my mother oversaw a horse operation. Today, my wife and I own 285 acres in Loudoun County, Virginia, where she trains and boards horses for clients.

I am a forester by training. My interest in forestry was kindled at an early age. I not only spent time in the woods at our farm in Kentucky but my family also owns property in South Carolina that has been managed for wildlife conservation for over 100 years. As part of that, I have been closely involved in forest management decisions and related issues for decades. The decisions we make on our property in South Carolina – which forest stands to thin or harvest, which stands to use prescribed fire, and which areas to restore or set aside – shape the property for decades to come. As a forester, you are trained to take the long view and to balance production and conservation.

And, that's the perspective that I hope to bring to this job, if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed. Production and conservation are the flip side of the same coin. Agricultural production is vital to meet the food and fiber needs of a growing world, but that production relies on healthy soils, clean water and a stable climate. Conservation is vital for productivity.

Likewise, productivity is vital to conservation. Maintaining and enhancing the profitability of agriculture – that is, keeping working lands working – is necessary to meet our conservation goals. Conserving our natural resources means keeping farmers, ranchers and forest owners on the land. And, to do that, agriculture and forestry need to be productive and profitable. USDA can help maintain that profitability by providing a safety net that cushions agriculture from the challenges of markets and extreme weather and by promoting conservation practices that contribute to long-term productivity.

I was honored to serve during the Obama Administration as Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment. In that role, I oversaw not only the US Forest Service but also the Natural Resources Conservation Service which, if confirmed, I will be fortunate to work with again. If confirmed, I will come to this job with knowledge of USDA and deep appreciation of the staff that work there. My current work as Deputy Chief of Staff has only reaffirmed my belief in the quality of people that work at USDA.

USDA has much important work to do. If confirmed, I look forward to working with my colleagues in the FPAC mission area to strengthen the safety net, particularly in response to drought, flooding, fire and other extreme weather events. Likewise, agriculture and forestry have a vital role to play in addressing climate change through voluntary, incentive-based efforts that can create new income opportunities for producers and landowners. Equity is a vital consideration across all we do at USDA and I look forward to ensuring that all producers can access USDA programs.

Again, Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman, I want to thank the Committee for considering my nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the employees at USDA and in partnership with US agriculture to enhance the productivity and sustainability of America's farms, ranches and forest lands.