

TESTIMONY OF KEVIN W. CONCANNON
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY
July 7, 2009

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Senator Chambliss, Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry:

I am Kevin W. Concannon and appear before you as the nominee for Under Secretary of Agriculture responsible for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services.

I am most grateful to President Obama and Secretary Vilsack for placing their confidence in me as the nominee for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, especially so at this time in this challenging economy and when our country is so mindful of the millions of our fellow Americans facing the struggles of food insecurity, poor nutrition, obesity and the resulting health problems and costs accompanying these circumstances.

I am passionately committed to the obligation we share in as citizens and governments to those less fortunate among us. And, should the Senate vote to confirm my nomination, I will work diligently to provide the leadership and sound stewardship over these portfolios of food and nutrition programs and services.

In my roles as state health and human services director in Iowa, Maine, and Oregon I have overseen and championed USDA programs including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) formerly the Food Stamp Program, WIC – Women, Infants and Children, emergency food, commodity distribution program and have advocated for the School Lunch, School Breakfast, and Summer Feeding Program.

Last year in Iowa, with widespread devastation caused by tornadoes and unprecedented flooding, emergency disaster food assistance and SNAP benefits were among the first and vital elements in assisting thousands of Iowans adversely affected by the natural disasters. I had similar positive experiences with these programs a decade ago in Maine during a major winter ice storm and its aftermath. These are essential safety net programs.

Providing ready access to nutritious, affordable food through these USDA programs is an expressed goal of President Obama, Secretary Vilsack, many members of this committee and throughout Congress. Iowa has been a leader in promoting local farmers markets as a venue for affordable produce through SNAP and wireless technology. If confirmed, I will continue to promote through USDA programs like SNAP and WIC expanded access to farmers markets both for the benefit of program recipients and farmers.

Should I be confirmed, I will continue to advance the understanding and perspective I espoused as a state official: these programs are purposely and strategically in the Department of Agriculture because at their core they reflect the output of American farming. Programs such as SNAP benefit at least three major groups of Americans: the

34 million recipients of the program, nearly half of whom are children; food suppliers, food stores, and retail outlets; and the farmers who ultimately grow the food.

I feel especially fortunate and honored to be before you today as a first generation American. My parents, now deceased, were Irish immigrants, naturalized citizens who conveyed to their children among other human values: a sense of our good fortune as Americans, our obligation to others, and our respect for government.

While there is no shortage of challenges and obligations within the FN&C at USDA, should the Senate choose to confirm me I will also work to find common cause with other sectors of USDA and with sister federal agencies such as the CMS, CDC, and Administration on Children and Families in HHS who share responsibilities and areas of focus that impact American consumers and particularly low income persons. From my state level experience, I know that some of our more effective initiatives that helped people were those that cut across organizational boundaries and limitations.

Importantly, I have enjoyed the many opportunities and outcomes of working with Governors and state and federal elected representatives. And if confirmed, pledge to work with members and staff of the Committee in meeting our obligation to the American people through the programs and services of the Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services.

Finally, I wish to express my love and appreciation to my wife, my children, and their families, and my brothers and sisters for their support and encouragement over my years in public service, the sacrifices they have made, and their enthusiasm for this opportunity to serve in a national leadership capacity.

Again, I thank you for your consideration and I look forward to responding to your questions.