

Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin, Members of the Committee, I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you this morning as President Bush's nominee to be the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. Thank you for promptly scheduling this hearing to consider my nomination. I am humbled and honored to have been nominated to serve President Bush.

I want to begin my opening statement by thanking the man who is responsible for many of my professional successes. Senator Lugar, as most of you know, has had a profound impact on my life. You will note from my information that I was only 22 years old when Senator Lugar took a chance and offered a farm boy from Indiana the opportunity to come to Washington to work on food and agricultural policy. On the day that I started working for Senator Lugar, I left behind tearful relatives in Indiana and flew on an airplane for the first time and traveled to Washington, D.C. My life would never be the same and the next seventeen years were some of my very best. Senator Lugar, you have modeled for me a life of integrity and decency in public service and for that I will always be grateful.

And Senator Lugar has had a large impact on my personal life. He also gave an opportunity to a young woman from Fort Wayne, Indiana to work in his office. My wife Dru and I met and were married while working in his office and I will always be grateful to him for providing the opportunity for the two of us to meet. Dru and I now have four terrific children who are here with me today.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed by the Senate, I want you to know that I will be guided by my experiences that have helped to shape my professional career over the last 24 years.

First, I have seen this committee through many leadership changes. Herman Talmage, a Democrat from Georgia, was the Chairman of this committee when I started working here in 1980. Senators Lugar, Cochran, and Leahy are the only members still serving the committee from those days. The issues have changed somewhat, but one thing that has not changed, is the fact that this Committee continues to accomplish great things through bipartisanship efforts.

During my tenure as Staff director of this committee, I hope I demonstrated my desire and ability to work with both sides of the aisle. We may disagree, but we can debate those disagreements knowing that each participant has a common goal; the goal of promoting the welfare and interest of the farmers and ranchers of this great land whose production sustains all of us. That is a value shared by Secretary Johanns and President Bush. If confirmed by this committee and the full Senate, I pledge to you that I will continue to make every effort to work with both sides of the aisle and to all regions of the country.

Secondly, my first hand experiences have developed in me an appreciation of the honor and importance of production agriculture. I grew up on a family farm. I watched my father toil every day of his life just to provide a modest living for his family. If confirmed, I will be an advocate for all farmers and ranchers. The farmers and ranchers who provide an abundance of low cost food and fiber for this country and others around the world should be given the opportunity to earn a decent income for their family. This applies to the farmers and ranchers of Georgia or North Dakota, or Vermont, or California as well as the farmers and ranchers of Indiana.

Thirdly, I believe we must do everything we can in order to keep a competitive advantage around the globe for U.S. farmers and ranchers. This principle means that, just like President Bush and Secretary Johanns I am firmly behind our trade negotiations and their efforts to reduce tariffs and duties on our agricultural exports. It is difficult to remain competitive if big duties must be paid in order to export. I believe this can be done in an environmentally sensitive manner by using incentive based programs, many of which are targeted to working lands. To remain competitive, we must also utilize our strong agricultural research system and must get its information to the hands of producers.

Mr. Chairman, my experiences on this committee have not been limited to farm programs. The late 1980's and early 1990's were difficult years for American agriculture. The Senior Senator from Vermont, Senator Leahy, was the chairman of this committee during many of those years and we faced many difficult challenges. We tackled issues like rescuing the Farm Credit System, promoting conservation programs, providing a safety net for the poor, reorganizing the U.S. Department of Agriculture, managing our National Forest System, strengthening rural development, and others. All were priorities of the Chairman and Ranking Member and it has gone a long way toward preparing me for the awesome responsibility that if confirmed awaits me at such a diverse agency as USDA.

I close by simply thanking the members of this committee, past and present, for your help in preparing me for this job. If confirmed by this committee and the U.S. Senate, I can assure you that I will work hard to earn your support and respect and to live up to the standards exemplified by the members of this committee.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer your questions.