

TESTIMONY OF KRYSTA HARDEN
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
May 7, 2009

It is with pride and pleasure that I am here today before the members of the Senate Agriculture Committee as the nominee for Assistant Secretary of Congressional Relations. Senator Chambliss, thank you for your introduction. I never would have thought years ago when we first met that either one of us would be in this position. It is truly an honor to have you introduce me to the Committee. I appreciate your leadership and friendship.

And, thank you, Mr. Chairman. It has been a pleasure to work with you on many issues impacting agriculture. I enjoyed my years working with soybean growers, many of them from your state. I learned a great deal about agriculture and conservation from you and your constituents.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Chambliss, and the members of the Committee, I come before you with an open mind and a willingness to work with each and every one of you. I will be responsive to your requests and respectful of your concerns and questions.

And, while I will not always have the answers you seek, and certainly your positions on issues may not match those of USDA leadership, I will be fair, honest, and straightforward in my dealings with you and your staff.

I know that successful relationships are two way. There must be open communication, a sharing of information, and trust between parties. If confirmed, I pledge to do my part in making sure that happens. I truly look forward to strengthening old relationships and building new ones.

As the Committee considers my nomination for this position, I hope you will take into account my record, experiences, and commitment of service to the Congress as well as the functions and mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

As the daughter of a Georgia farm family, I have a strong appreciation for American agriculture. I know first-hand the challenges that farmers and ranchers face trying to make a living in today's tough economic climate. I also know that those who work the land are diligent and innovative enough to continue to advance American agriculture.

My almost twelve years as a staffer on Capitol Hill, gives me a clear understanding of the pressures and demands of your jobs. I know the value of prompt attention to your questions and concerns and the importance of listening to and learning about each of your state's unique situations.

I also believe that my experience in the private sector has also helped prepare me for this role. I have worked with landowners from every state and territory. I have traveled extensively and seen the variety and diversity of agriculture. I have been involved in a

wide range of issues including conservation, renewable energy, nutrition, research, and forestry. I look forward to working with each of you to make sure our policies are forward thinking and keep American agriculture competitive.

And, I am keenly aware of the many challenges we face, including implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill, getting economic recovery dollars on the ground, addressing lasting implications of recent disasters, defining agriculture's role in climate change, reauthorizing the Child Nutrition Act—the list goes on and on.

I feel confident that my upbringing, my experience, and my passion for the land and those who work the land everyday make me right for this position.

I look forward to assisting Secretary Vilsack with his strong commitment to civil rights at the Department. It is crucial that our programs and policies are fair, open for full participation, and provide service to all constituencies. If confirmed, I pledge to have an open door. I will do all that I can to ensure that everyone has access to the same information and that discrimination in any form is not tolerated.

I know that it is totally unlikely I will ever win an Academy Award for anything—I'm not an actor, you know—so I hope you will allow me just a few of minutes to thank a couple of people who are responsible for me being here today.

Certainly, the first person is President Obama who has nominated me for this position and Secretary Vilsack who is allowing me to serve in this role.

I also want to thank my husband Charles Hatcher who taught me so many things including that public service is an honor and a privilege and should never be abused or taken for granted; that working in a bi-partisan manner is a tradition in agriculture; and that compromise can be a good thing. Thank you, Charles, for your important lessons, love, and support.

I also want to thank my wonderful parents Jamie and Jimmy Harden at home in Camilla, Georgia and my sister JaBra Harden Fuller who is here today. Thank you for always being there for me – for guiding me, supporting me and loving me.

I would like to recognize three special young boys who are taking the day off from school to be with me for this important hearing....our God son Henry Mitchell and his brothers Campbell and Porter.

And finally, thank you to some folks who have helped shape my professional life, first friends and colleagues on and off Capitol Hill-many are in the room today; my colleagues at Gordley Associates, and certainly the leaders and staff of the National Association of Conservation Districts where I have spent the last five years of my career. I also want to recognize Steve Robinson, the president of NACD, who is here today from Ohio. Thank all you for your help and support.

Mr. Chairman and Senator Chambliss, if recommended by the Committee and confirmed by the Senate, I pledge to serve as Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations with honor and respect. I look forward to working with each of you.