

Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin and distinguished members of the Committee, I am both honored and humbled to appear before you today for consideration for the position of Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services. I would like to express my gratitude to President Bush for nominating me and my appreciation to Secretary Johanns and Deputy Secretary Conner for the confidence they have bestowed upon me. I especially want to thank Senator Thad Cochran for his gracious introduction.

I have been extremely fortunate to have been able to serve Senator Cochran as his Legislative Assistant for Agriculture for 7 ½ years and as his Chief of Staff for the past ten years. During my tenure with him I learned a tremendous amount. In fact, I have spent many hours in this very room participating in staff deliberations, Committee hearings and mark-ups addressing numerous issues important to American agriculture. It has been an honor for me to serve Senator Cochran for these many years, and I owe a great deal to him for the person that I am today. He has been a tremendous influence in my life, both professionally and personally. Senator Cochran is a thoughtful and deliberate decision maker. He always wants to know the facts and not the rhetoric. Of the many things I have learned from the Senator, the most important is how to treat people - always with dignity and respect.

I also would like to recognize my best friend and partner in life for the past 22 years, my beloved wife Rhonda, who is the mother of our four children; two year old triplets - Kathryn, Everett, Mary Phillips, and seven month old Victoria.

I was born in Starkville, Mississippi, while my father was studying agriculture at Mississippi State University. Early in his professional life, my father went to work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. After over 30 years of service with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, he retired and is currently living with my mother on a small farm in the Mississippi Delta. During my father's service with USDA, we lived in several small rural communities in Mississippi.

My paternal grandfather also worked for USDA with the former Soil and Water Conservation Service. He too owned a farm in the Mississippi Delta, in addition to owning and managing with my grandmother a small "country store." I have very fond memories of riding on a tractor with him as a young boy while he plowed his fields. If confirmed, I would be a third generation employee of USDA.

I have grown up in and around agriculture all my life. My experiences span from working as a farm laborer, crop scout, agricultural extension specialist, agricultural research associate, and an agricultural economics professor, to working with the members and staff of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry during the consideration of three Farm Bills and other legislative initiatives important to American agriculture.

During my career, I have learned a great deal about the complex nature of agricultural production that farmers face today. U.S. farmers and ranchers are the most efficient and resilient producers in the world. Our federal government has a key role to play in ensuring that U.S. farmers are able to meet the challenges of producing a bountiful supply of safe and

affordable food and fiber products, despite the many risks they face. Farmers also should have the resources and support they need from the government to produce crops that can help to reduce our nation's dependency on foreign oil. Additionally, with agricultural exports expected to reach a record of \$68 billion this year, it is imperative for our government to work aggressively to promote U.S. agricultural products in the international arena while pursuing fair access to vital export markets.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members, I have spent the greater part of my career working within the Senate family and therefore I have a keen appreciation for the unique nature of the legislative process. I believe this experience will be especially beneficial during reauthorization of the Farm Bill this coming year. During my tenure, I have especially recognized the importance and the benefits of pursuing solutions in a bipartisan manner. I can pledge to this Committee, that if confirmed I will fully dedicate myself to the broad mission of this important office and that I will commit to be accessible to all Members and staff.

Again, Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin, and distinguished members of the Committee, I want to thank you for allowing me to appear before you today and I welcome any questions or comments.

Thank you.