

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I am honored and grateful to appear before you as the President's nominee for the position of Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services. I would like to thank President Bush and Secretary Johanns for their trust and for this honor as well as all those who supported me. I would especially like to thank my husband, Randy, for his support and belief in me. I also want to thank my children, Melissa and Jesse Montanez.

I was born and raised in a farming community in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. My parents, Joseph and Nancy Saldivar, were immigrants to the United States. My father worked long hours in the fields and as a young girl I worked beside him, along with the rest of my family. In addition to teaching me by example the importance of good work ethics, my father and mother also showed me the value of family. I will always be grateful to them.

After high school, I worked part-time as a unit secretary at the local hospital. As a secretary, I began to experience serving families through the intensive care unit. I was very fond of this aspect of my work and decided to pursue an education in social work. I earned a college degree while working and raising two children. I was a single parent faced with many challenges. I am not embarrassed by that fact. It is a part of who I am and why I believe I am qualified for this job. I know what it is like to be on the verge of not making ends meet. I believe it is important to ensure those who are eligible for assistance have access to benefits.

After earning my degree, I served as a social worker. Experiencing the sometimes heartbreaking need first-hand did not deter or discourage me. It inspired me to work even harder, knowing that as a social worker, I had the ability to impact the need and to ease the very struggle I faced as a single parent. I have no illusions about ending all hunger, but that won't stop me from trying to impact the problem. When I was promoted to a Service Area Administrator, I viewed the added responsibilities as raising the bar for me as a public servant. It meant I could no longer simply tell the boss about my caseload concerns; I now had the ability, and therefore the responsibility, to address the challenges that prevent us from improving the human condition.

Two years ago, I was honored to be appointed as the Director of Nebraska Health and Human Services. In this position, which I currently serve, I am responsible for a staff of 5,000 and a budget of over \$960 million. We touch thousands of lives and it is a tremendous opportunity to help people. I am grateful to have this chance to serve and make a difference.

I have a conviction that in whatever capacity one serves the public, it is the principles that bring quality to the service. The principles of compassion, integrity, respect, openness and honesty have kept me focused on service and the value of families. These are the principles I brought with me as a social worker and as the Director of the Nebraska Health and Human Services. If confirmed to serve as Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, I will hold to these same principles. I also pledge to listen to our customers, service providers, state and local partners, advocacy groups, and certainly you here in Congress to determine better ways to serve our clients.

I am excited by the opportunity to work with the experienced and highly talented staff at the Food and Nutrition Service and the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. They are

dedicated to helping others and it would be an honor to join them.

In closing, I want to say I am eager to continue my work as a public servant devoted to providing children and low-income families with access to food, a healthful diet and nutrition education. Furthermore, if confirmed, I look forward to working together to fulfill our duty and service to this Nation and its citizens.

Thank you for your time, and I will be happy to answer any questions you might have.