

Testimony of Pearlie S. Reed
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
May 7, 2009

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Chambliss, and Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you today. I would like to thank Senator Lincoln, from the great State of Arkansas, for her kind introduction. I would like to thank all of those who are responsible for my success in life, especially my family and the many great men and women who I served with during my career at USDA. I thank President Obama and Secretary Vilsack for their vote of confidence, manifested in my nomination for the position of Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Administration.

Secretary Vilsack has shared with me his vision for USDA. I understand and believe in what he would like to accomplish. If confirmed, I will be 100 percent committed to ensuring that the management apparatus of the Department is focused on the efficient and effective delivery of programs and services USDA wide.

I have worked and lived in four of the major regions of our great country – the South, East, Midwest, and West. I have had two tours of duty at USDA Headquarters in Washington, DC. During my career in and out of government I have seen all sides of USDA, the excellent, the good, the bad and the ugly. I have had a remarkable career -- rising from a Grade GS- 03 Soil Conservation Aid to Chief of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Also, from 1997 to 1998, I served as Acting Assistant Secretary for Administration, the position I am now being nominated for.

I have also served as State Conservationist for Maryland and California. I took advantage of training, self development, and other opportunities made available by USDA. I do not know of any other organization where I could have accomplished more. And, because of these opportunities and my background, I feel that I am uniquely qualified to help USDA and, if confirmed, I will work tirelessly with Secretary Vilsack, his leadership team, the Congress, and stakeholders to improve USDA.

I fully understand the complexity of the Department of Agriculture. That complexity is compounded by the massive structure of the USDA field based agencies, and the system of state and county committees, commissions, and boards. The management of the Department must ensure that the delivery of programs and services impacted by this system is made available to all who qualify. It is with this in mind that I want to emphasize my commitment to resolving outstanding civil rights claims and any discriminatory employment practices. Secretary Vilsack has strongly stated his commitment to these issues and, if confirmed, I too, pledge to not tolerate discrimination in any form at USDA. I believe that, if we work together, many of the challenges we currently face can be corrected.

The management agenda of the Department must include an aggressive investment in its human capital. The selection, development, and retention of top talent are paramount. If confirmed, I will use all authorities available to USDA to pursue excellence in human resources management.

In addition, I believe that all Departmental Administration areas are important. If confirmed, I will ensure that Departmental Administration is providing the services needed to underpin the effective and efficient delivery of USDA programs and services.

I will conclude by once again thanking President Obama and Secretary Vilsack for their confidence in me and also thank you - Mr. Chairman, Senator Chambliss, and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.