

**Opening Statement of Stephen Alexander Vaden**  
**April 8, 2025**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and members of the Committee, it is an honor to come before you today as the President's nominee to serve as Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture. Before I have an opportunity to answer your questions, I wish to spend a few moments to tell you about my background and why the President's nomination – and the Secretary's confidence – are personally meaningful for me.

I come from a farming family. My father, John Marshall Vaden, was born on a farm in rural Obion County, Tennessee, in 1918 and engaged in farming his whole life. Following his death, my brother and I learned that one of the family farms we inherited had been in the family since the early 1800s, as it appears in exactly its current dimensions on the original map of Fulton County, Kentucky, with the name of my ancestor handwritten across its plat.

It was the profits my Father reaped that paved the way for me to come before you today. Those profits, wisely invested over time, paid for the exorbitant tuition charged by Vanderbilt University and Yale Law School. They made it possible for me to delay entering the private practice of law so that I could clerk for two of our nation's federal judges. They supported my move to the much more expensive Washington, D.C., area, where I entered the private practice of law first at the firm of Patton Boggs and later at the firm of Jones Day. I need no refresher course on why low commodity prices are harmful the futures of rural communities; it has been my reality since birth.

Should I be confirmed, I would be entering the Department at a time of uncertainty for the producers the Department serves. Agriculture is — for the first time in living memory — dealing with a structural trade deficit. The only way out is to open new markets for American producers to sell their crops. As a judge who has served the past four years on a court possessing exclusive

jurisdiction over most of the United States' trade matters, I hope to bring this experience to bear in advising the Secretary and her team on opportunities to remove trade barriers hindering market access for America's farmers, foresters, and ranchers. America's producers are the most efficient for a reason: They are not afraid of technological progress that has allowed them to produce more food and fiber from a shrinking agricultural footprint. We must ensure their productivity is not turned into a weapon against them that harms their financial futures.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that, for nearly the entirety of the first Trump Administration, I served in the Office of General Counsel. I have told each crop of new law clerks in my chambers that it remains the favorite job I have ever held. It is a high honor to work with a team dedicated to allowing rural America to thrive once again. I am grateful that the President and the Secretary chose Tyler Clarkson to serve as General Counsel in this second Administration. I know he will ensure that all that USDA does remains on the right side of the law. The opportunity to work with Tyler and many of the other wonderful people who served in that first term is what leads me here today to ask you to allow me to serve once again.

As I mentioned at the opening of my remarks, my Father was a farmer. Throughout his life, he also was a grocer, an investor, and a real estate developer. But it was the title of farmer of which he was most proud. I know this because he placed that title – "Farmer" – below his name on every check I ever saw him sign. The last three checks he ever signed hang on my judicial chambers' wall, framed, as a reminder of the responsibilities I bear as a federal judge to ensure that all who come before me are treated fairly, equitably, and in accordance with the law. Should the Senate confirm me as Deputy Secretary, I commit to you to carry out the responsibilities of that office with this same, very personal, commitment.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to come before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.