

NOMINATIONS OF THE HONORABLE STEPHEN
VADEN TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
AND TYLER CLARKSON TO BE GENERAL COUNSEL
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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OF AGRICULTURE**

TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2025

U.S. SENATE
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., in Room 328A, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. John Boozman, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Boozman [presiding], McConnell, Hoeven, Marshall, Tuberville, Justice, Fischer, Moran, Klobuchar, Bennet, Smith, Luján, Warnock, Welch, and Schiff.

Also present: Senator Blackburn, and Hagerty.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BOOZMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE
STATE OF ARKANSAS, CHAIRMAN, U.S. COMMITTEE ON AGRI-
CULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY**

Chairman BOOZMAN. Good morning, and welcome. It is my privilege to call this hearing to order. Today, we will consider the nominations of Judge Stephen Alexander Vaden, to be Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture, and Mr. Tyler Clarkson, to be General Counsel of the United States Department of Agriculture. We welcome both of you to the Committee, and congratulate you on your nominations.

You have been nominated at a very challenging time for rural America. This Committee has examined the challenges facing our country's hardworking farmers, ranchers, and rural businesses. We have heard how they are struggling to keep up, let alone make a profit in this current economic climate. Farmers everywhere are losing money on every acre that they cultivate.

Furthermore, while the President has imposed tariffs designed to address unfair practices and market manipulation by our trading partners to level the playing field, it remains to be seen how these will impact agriculture, causing much unease. Beyond the economic uncertainty our farmers and ranchers are experiencing our producers want to know that USDA is in their corner advocating for their needs. I was pleased to see USDA quickly distribute the economic assistance Congress approved at the end of last year. While implementation has gone relatively smoothly, we continue to be in contact with the Department to make sure implementation of the

Emergency Commodity Assistance Program is following congressional intent.

We are pleased to have the Secretary with us today. Thank you so much for being here, and we do appreciate your hard work in doing a good job of getting the economic assistance out. I am confident that Judge Vaden and Mr. Clarkson will help ensure careful and deliberate decisions are made regarding vital USDA programs. They both bring impressive legal backgrounds and USDA experience that will serve Secretary Rollins and our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities well.

Judge Vaden, whose family's farmed in Tennessee and Kentucky since the 1800's, has a legal background that spans the private sector, USDA, and the Federal bench. His understanding of agriculture, the law, and USDA will serve him well as he is tasked with managing the day-to-day operations of the Department.

Mr. Clarkson, having previously served as Deputy General Counsel, Principal Deputy General Counsel, and Acting General Counsel at USDA, is well prepared. It should be from all of that, to serve as the Department's General Counsel. As General Counsel, Mr. Clarkson will be tasked with providing legal advice to Secretary Rollins, and all other officials and agencies at USDA. This Committee will lean on his statutory interpretations and legal expertise as we develop policies being considered by Congress.

While the roles of Deputy Secretary and General Counsel are not always public-facing, they are essential in ensuring the Department remains focused on the mission and compliance with laws and regulations. I am thankful for Mr. Vaden and Mr. Clarkson being willing to serve, and confident both nominees will perform their roles well.

I look forward to hearing your testimony and answer to the questions. Now, I turn to Ranking Member Klobuchar for her opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF HON. KLOBUCHAR, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Well, thank you very much, Chairman Boozman, for holding this hearing today to consider nominees for two critical positions of the Department of Agriculture. Thank you, Judge Vaden, and Mr. Clarkson, for being with us today. I also want to welcome your wife, Kristin, and soon to be new baby. Congratulations to your family. It is good to see Secretary Rollins here as well, as well as Senators Blackburn, and I believe, and Senator Hagerty. Thank you, Representatives Kustoff and Rose.

The past few months, I do not think I am telling anyone in this room anything that is a breaking news, but have been a turbulent time—that is a Minnesota euphemism—for farmers, ranchers, and rural Americans. As expected, key trading partners for U.S. Ag exports have announced retaliatory tariffs following President Trump's tariff rollout last week, and that is a huge headwind coming the way or already here when it comes to things like soybean future prices and the like.

That is in addition to the headwinds of input costs, and weather, and avian flu, and some of these other things that our farmers and ranchers have had to deal with. For some of my smaller farmers

and ranchers, this is just maybe the thing that puts them over. It is easier for bigger operations to absorb things, but this has been very hard for them. I hope that we will get some change there.

American farmers and ranchers need certainty, and that means strong leadership at the USDA, including of course, who gets placed in the roles of the Deputy Secretary and General Counsel. The Deputy Secretary is the second highest ranking official at USDA, traditionally acted as the COO of the Department. It requires the job, a deep commitment to ensuring the Department fulfills its important missions and can serve the farmers, ranchers and rural Americans across the country that look to the USDA.

Judge, you have been nominated for this critical position. I am looking forward to hearing more about how your experiences would influence your approach to serving as Deputy Secretary. We met in my office. I appreciate that. As you and I discussed, concerns have been raised about your past record at USDA, including the work affecting farm loan programs, Ag research, and nutrition programs. I hope to learn more today, as do our other Members, how you will defend the critical programs at USDA and work collaboratively with the USDA unions and be responsive to Congress.

Mr. Clarkson, you previously served as Judge Vaden's Deputy General Counsel and are now nominated to be the General Counsel. As you know, the General Counsel is the Chief Legal Officer of the USDA, overseeing over 250 attorneys in the Office of the General Counsel. The General Counsel also supervises the Office of Ethics and the Office of Information Affairs, which is responsible for the USDA's Freedom of Information Act and record management programs.

In addition, this job involves advising the Secretary and Deputy Secretary on rulemaking processes and compliance and enforcement of the law. Given your familiarity with the Department, I hope to learn more today about what you will do as General Counsel, if confirmed, to uphold the rule of law at USDA, implement USDA programs fairly for all Americans, and ensure that the Department is responsive to Congress.

Across the country, farmers, families, and rural communities are concerned, as I noted, about the policies that are currently being put in place by the Trump Administration. Whether it is cutting funding to emergency food providers or trade chaos, or across the board firings of USDA employees.

In these uncertain times, it is absolutely necessary that we have individuals in these important positions that we are considering today who understand the critical services USDA provides to Americans and will do all they can to be a voice for the farmers and ranchers and those that are getting the SNAP benefits and those that are using the conservation programs and the people of America that benefit from those programs.

My point here is that it is more important than ever that the Agriculture Department is standing up for the people that it looks out for. Thank you.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Today, we will be joined by our colleagues from Tennessee, Senator Blackburn and Senator Hagerty. Welcome. We thank you for taking the time to come over. They are

going to be introducing our nominee, Judge Stephen Vaden, and we will begin with you, Marsha.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Since the Secretary is here with us this morning, I want to take a moment to publicly thank her for the response USDA has had to flood victims in Tennessee. Upper East Tennessee has been devastated, and she has had her team on the ground responsive to the agriculture community there. Tennesseans are grateful. We thank her today.

Today it is such a pleasure for me to introduce Stephen Vaden. Now, this is the second time I have had the opportunity to do this because when President Trump nominated him for the U.S. Court of International Trade, I had the opportunity to shepherd him through Judiciary Committee. I will remind my colleagues it was very successful. He sailed through, and we got him right to work, and he has done a great job. I am depending on the Ag Committee to do the exact same thing today.

I will admit I am a little bit biased to Judge Vaden because he is a Tennessean, and then he is someone that I have gotten to know fairly well. Seeing him at home in Tennessee, seeing him around his friends and his colleagues, and knowing what he has to continue to support our great State is really quite remarkable. I know that he will bring all of this background and be a superb U.S. Agriculture Deputy Secretary. We are thrilled that he is here.

By way of his background, he is a native of Union City, Tennessee, where he grew up working with his father on his family's row crop farm. This really instilled in him that passion for agriculture, and so many of us that grew up on farms, 4-H Clubs, FFA clubs, we carry that with us.

During his tenure as General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture from 2017 to 2020, he supervised over 250 legal professionals across 13 offices, and provided the guidance on matters vital to the Ag community. His accomplishments included successfully litigating two cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, implementing key provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill, and leading the development of critical regulations for the sale of hemp and bio-engineered product.

As a judge on the U.S. Court of International Trade, Judge Vaden brings a unique understanding of agriculture's role in international markets and that marketplace. His work addressing Federal trade issues, including those involving Ag commodities will be indispensable as USDA continues to navigate global trade challenges and create a level playing field, and expanded opportunities, and expanded markets for U.S. farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses.

Judge Vaden is uniquely prepared and situated for this position, and I look forward to his swift confirmation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Senator Hagerty.

Senator HAGERTY. Chairman Boozman, and Ranking Member Klobuchar, I want to thank you for holding this hearing. Secretary Rollins, I want to thank you for your friendship, and for your support of Tennesseans, particularly in our time of need.

It is my pleasure today to introduce my friend and fellow Tennessean, Judge Stephen Vaden. Stephen's been nominated by

President Trump to serve as the Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. His career in public service has been distinguished by his legal expertise, his deep commitment to our Nation's agricultural and trade policy, and his steadfast dedication to supporting rural America.

During the first Trump Administration, Stephen served as the General Counsel for the USDA. In that capacity, he provided legal counsel across all the Department's critical missions, ranging from agricultural policy and rural development, to food safety and trade. His leadership at USDA demonstrated not only his legal acumen, but also his unwavering commitment to advancing the interest of American farmers and ranchers.

Following his tenure at USDA, Stephen continued his public service as a judge on the United States Court of International Trade starting in 2021. In this role, Stephen worked at the crossroads of law, global commerce, and economic security. This experience has given him a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complexities of agricultural trade law, the challenges of global supply chains, and the broader economic forces that affect our rural communities.

Stephen's judicial service has strengthened his already robust understanding of how agricultural policy intersects with trade law and international economics. He has seen firsthand how policy decisions on a global scale can directly impact our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. This unique perspective is invaluable, especially as American agriculture faces increasing international pressures and challenges. It is clear that Stephen's experience in this area will serve him well as he returns to USDA at a pivotal time.

Stephen was raised on a family farm with deep ties to the land, and a profound respect for rural America. His family's farm in West Tennessee was not only foundational to his upbringing, but it also shaped his perspective on the values of hard work, integrity, and the importance of supporting communities that make up the backbone of our Nation's agricultural sector.

If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, Stephen will bring integrity, a wealth of experience, and a results-oriented mindset to this vital role. He understands the mission of the USDA, not just in theory, but in practice. He has lived it, and he is deeply committed to ensuring that the Department supports and strengthens American agriculture. He will work closely with Congress, State, and local governments, and the American people to ensure that USDA delivers on its promise to serve our Nation's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

There are real and significant challenges facing American agriculture today, including the need to equip our farmers and ranchers with the tools they need to succeed in an increasingly complex global marketplace. I have full confidence in Stephen's ability to meet these challenges head-on as he has done throughout his career.

In closing, I am proud to support Judge Stephen Vaden for the position of Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture. His qualifications, his integrity, and his commitment to public service make him an outstanding candidate for this crit-

ical role. I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure his swift confirmation. Thank you.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Thank you so much, and thank you all for being here. I know you are incredibly busy right now as all of us are, and it just highlights how important this hearing is. Again, thank you very much for taking your time.

I would like to introduce Mr. Tyler Clarkson, the President's nominee to be General Counsel for the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Clarkson currently serves as Vice President and Deputy General Counsel of Ginkgo Bioworks. He previously served as Acting General Counsel, Principal Deputy General Counsel, and Deputy General Counsel at USDA.

Mr. Clarkson also worked on regulatory enforcement at the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, and is a graduate of the University of Virginia.

Today, we are pleased to have Senator Justice's wife and daughter visiting us. Thank you all. Again, I think Babydog is here. Babydog is the key to the West Virginia Senator's success. Again, it just highlights the importance of this hearing today.

Senator HOEVEN. Mr. Chairman, I have a question for the record. Does Babydog qualify as livestock?

[Laughter.]

Chairman BOOZMAN. Some would say.

Senator HOEVEN. Well, I was just going to say, Governor, you know, it is a bit of a risk bringing livestock to an Ag Committee because you know what we do with livestock. We love Babydog, so we certainly welcome the visit.

Senator JUSTICE. I will put her in my lap just for a minute. Babydog will say hi to everybody. She is really looking forward to some chicken nuggets right now. Listen, thank you all so much for wanting to see her. She is really special because she makes you smile. She humanizes all of us. She loves everybody, honest to goodness, rich or poor, or Black or White, or God forbid, a Democrat or Republican. She loves everybody. That is good stuff in my book. Nevertheless, she is going to say bye because she is heavy.

[Laughter.]

Chairman BOOZMAN. Very good. Okay. We got to get back to business. We will now administer the oath, and then begin with witness testimonies. Each witness will have five minutes.

If you would stand and raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm that the statements you are about to provide is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. VADEN. I do.

Mr. CLARKSON. I do.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Do you agree that, if confirmed, you will respond to request to appear and testify before any duly constituted Committee of the Senate?

Mr. VADEN. I do.

Mr. CLARKSON. I do.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Very good. Thank you.

Judge Vaden, you are now recognized for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF HON. STEPHEN VADEN, OF TENNESSEE, TO BE
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE**

Mr. VADEN. Thank you, 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 to 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 entire life. Following his death, my brother and I learned that one of the family farms that we had inherited has been in the family since the early 1800's as it appears in exactly its current dimensions on the original map of Fulton County, Kentucky, with the name of my ancestor, handwritten across the plat.

It was the profits my father reaped that paved the way for me to come before you here today. Those profits, wisely invested over time, paid for the exorbitant tuition at Vanderbilt University and Yale Law School. They made it possible for me to delay entering the private practice of law in order to clerk for two of our Nation's finest Federal judges. They supported the move to the more expensive Washington, DC area where I entered the private practice of law, first at the firm of Patton Boggs and then at the firm of Jones Day.

I need no refresher course on why low commodity prices are harmful to 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 of my crops of new law clerks that it remains my favorite job that I have ever had to this day. 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 have chosen my friend, Tyler Clarkson, to serve as General Counsel in this second administration. I know he will ensure that all USDA does re-

mains on the right side of the law. It is the opportunity to work with Tyler and many of the other wonderful people that I served with in that first term, that is what leads me here today to ask you to allow me to serve once again.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, my father was a farmer. Throughout his life, he 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 that 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 chamber's wall framed as a reminder of the responsibilities that I bear as a Federal judge to ensure that all who come before the Department and 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 very same personal commitment. Thank you once again for the opportunity to come before you, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Vaden can be found on page 38 in the appendix.]

Chairman BOOZMAN. Thank you, Judge Vaden. Mr. Clarkson.

**STATEMENT OF MR. TYLER CLARKSON, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Mr. CLARKSON. Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and distinguished Senators of the Committee. I first want to thank President Trump for the nomination to serve as General Counsel at the United States Department of Agriculture. I had the great privilege to serve during the President's first term. It would be an honor to work on the President's behalf a second time.

I also want to thank Secretary Rollins for her confidence in my ability to work as the agency's lead attorney. Secretary Rollins has laid out an ambitious agenda for USDA. I hope to have the chance to help the Secretary implement her vision.

Thank you to this Committee for its consideration of my nomination. I am grateful for the opportunity to have met with several Members of this Committee. During those discussions, I heard firsthand about this Committee's priorities as well as the uncertainties facing U.S. agriculture and what USDA might do to mitigate such uncertainties. If I have the fortune to be confirmed, I look forward to working alongside the men and women at USDA who work each and every day on behalf of our Nation's farmers, producers, and the broader American public.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay special thanks to my wife, Kristin, my mom and dad, my sister, Cami, and my wider family. I am indebted to each one of them, and deeply appreciative of their unending support and love.

The chance to return to USDA and lead OGC presents a significant opportunity to help this Nation's farmers and producers. Prior to serving at USDA in the President's first term, I would not have characterized myself as an Ag person. Having spent nearly three years at the Department, I learned about agriculture and the great sacrifice many of our farmers and producers make to feed this country.

Farmers, ranchers, and producers not only create a great bounty for this country, but also these individuals establish a stability and rootedness in the body politic. It is our farms that offer a glimpse of American life across generations. It is our farms that promise a just reward for a hard day's work. It is our farms that preserve a rural way of life in this country. These are all things worth protecting.

Too often, many take this country's healthy, affordable, and abundant food supply for granted. In this moment, that blessing faces many challenges. Dynamic consumer preferences, foreign market access, regulatory uncertainty, access to credit and weather are just a few of the challenges facing our agriculture sector.

Congress has equipped USDA with tools to stand alongside farmers and producers in the face of such turbulence. While the Office of General Counsel does not set policy, OGC can play a substantial role in advising the Secretary and USDA's missionaries on available legal authorities to respond to these adversities.

In my first stint at the Department, I saw firsthand how much OGC can contribute to a sense of regulatory certainty. Successfully achieving that certainty in the President's first term was entirely thanks to Judge Vaden. He is unquestionably the sharpest attorney with whom I have ever worked and the Department would be lucky to have him as its Deputy Secretary.

OGC plays an outsized role in the Department's rulemaking efforts. I aspire to counsel the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary, and Under Secretaries on how to execute the President's policy agenda, while also fortifying final rulemakings against inevitable challenges.

OGC's close involvement on major rulemakings creates the best possible conditions for the President's deregulatory agenda. The President's agenda will free our farmers from unnecessary or anachronistic regulatory burdens. The President's agenda will incentivize advances in agricultural technology, including precision Ag and biotechnology. The President's agenda will best position our farmers and producers to compete.

An OGC that delivers on the President's agenda is an OGC that does justice for our farmers and producers. If I am confirmed, I will work each day on behalf of the President and the Secretary for the betterment of our farmers and producers.

Again, I thank this Committee for its consideration of my nomination, and I look forward to your questions today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Clarkson can be found on page 41 in the appendix.]

Chairman BOOZMAN. Well, thank both of you for your testimonies. Before I ask my questions, I would like to add letters of support from various farm groups for Judge Vaden and Mr. Clarkson's nomination in the record. Without objection, so ordered.

[The letters can be found on page 45 in the appendix.]

Chairman BOOZMAN. Judge Vaden, if confirmed, you will be the second highest ranking official at the Department of Agriculture. How will your previous experience in the private sector, at the Department, and on the Federal bench serve you in this new role?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, when it comes to my private sector experience, we have to remember that people engage in farming in

order to make a profit, and in order for them to feed their families. The profits that they make, feed the businesses, and help others feed their families in rural communities.

When I think of my home county of Obion County, Tennessee, it is the farmers that kind of spur all the economic development that exists there. It will allow me to keep in mind that when we are considering rules and regulations, these are going to have an effect on real people who are trying to make a living. It is those people, their experiences, and their needs, that will be first and foremost in their mind.

Then of course, as a judge, I have to keep in mind the questions that you, the Congress statutorily charge us with answering, and we have to remain faithful to the text of the law as you have passed it.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Mr. Clarkson, as the Committee continues drafting legislation like the Farm Bill, we rely on technical assistance from the Department and OGC. How do you view OGC's role in providing technical assistance? Will you commit to providing timely technical assistance to all Members of the Committee?

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. I pledge to provide prompt TA to the Committee in all instances, providing technical assistance to this Committee, particularly in a farm bill year, is of huge importance, and one of the things that I think is one of the most valuable contributions the Office of General Counsel can make. I stand ready, in the event I am confirmed, to ensure that technical assistance is timely and responsive.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Judge Vaden, given you have previous experience with internal reorganizations while at USDA, do you anticipate any future reorganizations that might be necessary to maximize the efficiency of the Department? If so, will you commit to working with and communicating with Congress as any such actions are contemplated?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, when it comes to the actions of the Department, we need to be communicating with you on a regular basis, whether it is about reorganizations, policy matters, or anything else. Because ultimately, all the Department does is carry out the will of Congress. The United States Department of Agriculture has no independent authority, separate of Congress. It is not established by the Constitution, it is a creature of statute.

You have my word that we will be in constant communication. My office, in particular, will be in constant communication with you about the Department's initiatives.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Very good. Mr. Clarkson, how do you foresee the Supreme Court's decision in *Loper Bright* impacting the work of the Department, including technical assistance provided to Congress as we work to draft a farm bill?

Mr. CLARKSON. Thanks for the question, Senator. I think *Loper Bright* puts additional stress on the words that you all put on a page. Agencies will have less deference from the judiciary with respect to agency expertise. That means that in the event we are proceeding with the rulemaking, we have to be all the more exacting in hewing closely to the statutory text.

With respect to TA, it is all the more important that we provide fulsome responsive TA to equip you all to write clear intelligible

statutes that give us the proper guidance and direct us in a way that is sustainable in court.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Very good. Senator Klobuchar.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much. Thank you, both of you, for your willingness to serve. My hope is that, if confirmed, you will be using your experience and your intelligence for good because we have a lot of headwinds as I just explained. I also appreciated the answers on technical assistance, including if, you know, I hope we can move forward on a farm bill, and both sides of the aisle are going to need that help as you also spoke to me about that in my office.

Since I met with both of you, things, in my mind, have gotten worse for our farmers and ranchers. Judge Vaden, in your testimony, you said that you were looking forward to working on opportunities to remove trade barriers for farmers. I think about many times under presence of both parties where we have done this. We recently unfrozen turkey during the last administration, got some tariffs reduced, great help to the turkey producers in my State, or I remember trade battles we did had with South Korea over beef and other things. We have been able to resolve this.

What I am concerned right now is that we are going in the opposite direction. That the administration's tariffs policy is instead leading to retaliatory tariffs, fewer markets for farmers, not greater trade, and what they want, which I am sure you have heard as you yourself, is trade not aid.

Could you talk about the President's current tariffs and what you think of them? Are they harmful for farmers? Do you have any ideas about how we are going to get out of this mess?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I have to be careful what I say when it regards tariff matters because I sit on a court that has exclusive jurisdiction to hear legal complaints that may be brought about the President's tariff actions. I hope you will understand if I talk in a more general nature.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Of course.

Mr. VADEN. Obviously, our farmers face a number of trade barriers. Historically, when we talk about trade policy, people have thought about manufacturing. If we are going to be throwing punches on behalf of America's economy, there are some punches that need to be thrown on behalf of American farmers, too, because while tariffs are the headline, what blocks so many American agricultural products from other countries are phony phytosanitary concerns, supposedly raising health or other welfare concerns about American products.

Now, we in this room know that America's farmers produce the finest that is available in the world, and we produce it in a quantity that no one else can match. This is protectionism by another name. What I hope to bring, should I be confirmed as Deputy Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, is a constant reminder to the President's trade team that we need to be on offense when it comes to American agriculture. Because ultimately, what we are going to be judged on is how many new markets we have opened up for our producers where they could not previously sell.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Very good. I do think you are aware, I mean, 20 percent of the production now is exported and I feel like

we are not on offense when it comes to farming. We are on defense because of what I have heard from my own farmers is they are just—they literally are getting calls that, no, we do not want to buy your stuff anymore. If you are confirmed in this job, I think the only way we go on offense is by having some sanity restored with respect to these tariffs.

The other thing I continue to hear from farmers and rural leaders in my State, and this is a 14-rural county tour I just did, is the unprecedented freeze and cancellation of agreements that create uncertainty. Last week, the Department indicated that it would be providing this Committee with an updated status of the programs in activities affected by the funding freeze.

This morning, they sent a list that included 15 programs affected by the funding freeze. We are currently reviewing the list. If confirmed, will you commit to ensuring that the Department follows through with providing a complete and accurate list, and update the Committee at least every other week because they are just—these are farmers who have no political bend. There was a program, maybe they were going to do cover crops, maybe they are going to do something else. They buy something including the precision Ag you all just referenced. Then suddenly they find out that they are not going to get the money, but then maybe another farmer down the street down the road gets the money. Just wondered if you would commit to that.

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I make the same commitment to you that I did to the Chairman. We need to be in communication with both sides of the aisle. AG is historically bipartisan. I want for that to continue and we will get you the information that you need.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Mr. Clarkson, thank you for being here. If confirmed, will you commit to advising the Secretary to comply with existing contracts and grants and unfreeze funds owed under existing contracts and grants?

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you, Senator. I pledge to you that I will absolutely follow the law and ensure that that is the advice the Secretary receives.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Recently, a leaked email from an employee at the Agriculture Research Service included a long list of terms that researchers were directed to avoid. I do not want to get into the legality.

We tried to check to see if it was real. We are not getting involved with this, but in a statement, a USDA spokesperson blamed the list on career employees, but did not dispute its validity. The statement issued by USDA regarding the list said USDA is getting back to work and putting farmers first, not woke ideology.

Okay. I have one focus question. The words ethanol, biofuel, and aviation fuel were included on this list. Judge Vaden, do you believe that research on biofuels, ethanol, and aviation fuel is woke ideology?

Mr. VADEN. Senator, I do not. Though it did not come up in my meeting with you, I discussed the Department's support for biofuels, and sustainable or synthetic, whichever term you prefer to use, aviation fuel, with your Members. I look forward to working with this Committee on that.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that. Judge Vaden and Mr. Clarkson, during your previous stints at USDA, there were the issues with collective bargaining agreements covering attorneys. I am not going to go over the whole thing. I think the Committee's been briefed on it.

Mr. Clarkson, if confirmed as General Counsel, will you commit to work with the OGC Union and honoring the existing OGC Union contract?

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. I am aware that the union at USDA/OGC achieved a collective bargaining agreement, I think sometime in late 2023. I believe that was the year. The point is, there is a standing agreement. I look forward to working with the union, if I am confirmed, and appreciate that at the moment, the agreement is not open for negotiation.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Judge, do you have anything you want to add to that?

Mr. VADEN. No, I think Tyler said it well.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Thank you very much to both of you. Again, if confirmed, we look forward to working with you and really appreciated our lengthy discussions in my office. Thank you.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Senator McConnell.

Senator MCCONNELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Judge, I think your most important qualification for this job is you are a fan of the Tennessee Walking Horses, as we are in Kentucky. Believe it or not, you even know where the Banana Festival is in Fulton County. Having checked those two boxes, you are obviously totally qualified for this job.

Look, I think you know that we are all concerned about the tariff issue. I do not know what kind of impact the Agricultural Department will have on the administration's tariff policy, but it is quite concerning to Kentucky farmers. We are the 13th largest exporter of agricultural goods. Believe it or not, even bourbon is considered agriculture because it is made from a whole lot of corn, largely grown in Kentucky. What the Canadians have already done is take the bourbon off the shelves, just taking it off the shelves, and that was the first blow that they landed on us. Give me your thoughts about where this all ends for American agriculture.

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I appreciate your commentary, and I hope I can see you at a future Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration or Banana Festival in the years to come. When it comes to your point about trade, I am reminded you will not be surprised of the Department's statutory responsibility. Congress has charged the Secretary of Agriculture and the Department as a whole with not only informing the President, but informing the rest of the cabinet about the effect of items under consideration on the economy of rural America.

That is what we have got to be. We have got to be a voice to let all of the policymakers know what the policies that they are considering will do in rural America, and suggest ways that those policies can better help rural America.

When it comes to my role in that, Senator, I have been called many things throughout my career. Quiet has never been one of them. You can rest assured that I will be a voice within the admin-

istration, letting them know where there are opportunities that they can do more for rural America and America's farmers.

Senator McCONNELL. Thank you. Mr. Chairman.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Senator Smith.

Senator SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Welcome to both of you. Thank you very much for your willingness to serve our country.

Mr. VADEN. I am just trying to find myself here. I want to start with a question for you, sir. A question about tribal relations. The United States, as you know, has legal trust and treaty obligations to tribal nations and all Federal agencies have a responsibility to uphold these government-to-government relationships with tribes.

This is a very important matter to USDA and something that I think both Republicans and Democrats agree needs work and attention. Could you start by explaining your understanding of this trust and treaty obligation that the Federal Government has to tribal nations, as you understand them, and how you would—how you think they should be applied in the USDA?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, as you have noted, the relationship that the Federal Government has with the Indian tribes is very special. It is a creature of Federal law and solely Federal law, and it represents commitments that the Federal Government has made frequently through treaties, dating back at times centuries, to commit to undertaking certain actions on behalf of Native Americans.

I certainly respect that. I know the Office of Tribal Relations helps us to manage those relationships within the Department of Agriculture. We cannot forget when we are dealing with Native Americans, that we are upholding a legal responsibility that the Federal Government willingly took on, often, as I mentioned, through treaties. Our word needs to be our bond, and we need to keep our word. It is that simple, I think.

Senator SMITH. Thank you for that. I think that there has been good work happening at the USDA using 638 authorities to establish self-governance pilots for some of the ways that USDA programs are implemented, essentially treating tribal governments as they are; as governments who have the ability to govern how some of these programs work.

Again, these have been broadly bipartisan, and I would hope to have an opportunity to work with you to expand some of those self-governance authorities as we look at, God willing, a farm bill at some point.

I want to turn to a discussion of rural development and rural housing. I am very interested in the work that we need to do in small towns and rural communities to expand access to housing, especially affordable housing, and also childcare. I hear from folks in Minnesota all the time that a shortage of housing and childcare is a big limit on economic growth in small towns and rural places where there just are not enough places for people to live in. Also, not enough places for childcare for people to, you know, safe places for people to take their children. There are good efforts in the USDA on both of these issues.

Could you talk a bit about how you see the issues of rural housing in particular?

Mr. VADEN. Well, yes, Senator. The work of the Rural Housing Service within the rural development mission area is critical, and

I need only look out the front window of my own home to know that, because the home across the street from me was purchased with the help of a loan backed by USDA's Rural Housing Service.

It is active in my community in Obion County, Tennessee, and I know the vital role that it plays in ensuring that homeowners, and frequently first-time homeowners, can live the American dream by purchasing a residence. I fully support that mission of rural development.

I would like to say something also about your note on childcare. You are entirely correct that it is a challenge that working families across this country face. I know it has been noted before the Committee that I serve in my church on the finance committee of First Baptist Church. One of the things that First Baptist Church does is provide childcare to members of the community.

I can tell you from the oversight role, at least from the finance side that we provide, that it is a struggle to make certain that we have the right employees who are paid properly, and a director who meets all of the requirements of State law in order to provide this vital function to allow people to work. I am familiar from my day-to-day life in Union City with the problems that these areas face. I would look forward to working with you on them, if confirmed.

Senator SMITH. Last Congress, sir, I worked with Senator Ernst and Senator Marshall to introduce legislation to help improve the quality and availability and affordability of childcare in rural communities. In fact, as our President Trump's Secretary of Labor was a leading sponsor of this bill when she was in the House. I would hope to have a chance to work with you on that piece of legislation going forward.

Also, the Rural Housing Service, as you say, has been vitally important in rural America. This is a policy area that has not had anybody take a good hard look at it to see where there is needs for reforms and improvements for many years. I have spent the last couple of years working with Senator Rounds from South Dakota on the Rural Housing Service Reform Act to do just that; to support the work of the Rural Housing Service, make it—you know, update it, modernize it, so that it can continue to do its work to preserve affordable housing for working rural families and seniors.

I am excited to move this bill forward. My colleague, Senator Moran and Senator Fetterman, Senator Warnock, of course, Senator Rounds, as well, are all partners with this. We have got good bipartisan support. Would you commit to working with me on that legislation to get it get it passed?

Mr. VADEN. Absolutely.

Senator SMITH. Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, I will cede back my time.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Thank you, Senator Smith. Senator Hoeven.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks both to Mr. Vaden and Mr. Clarkson for being here today.

Our farmers provide the highest quality, lowest cost food supply that benefits every American, every day. We need to do our part to make sure that we do not take for granted this network of small family farms and ranches that we have providing that across this great nation. Sixteen million people involved in agriculture directly

or indirectly at a time when many other industries have incredible concentration. This is a very important role that you two play.

I want to thank you for coming by the office and visiting with me. The first thing I want to bring up is the section line issues. In our State, which I brought up to you, it is very important that our farmers and ranchers are able to utilize those section lines. North Dakota has the right to those section lines. USDA has the ability to make sure that we have the right to those section lines. I ask for your assistance in working to address that important issue, starting with you, Mr. Vaden.

Mr. VADEN. Senator, first of all, thank you for giving me such a generous amount of your time when we met together. I appreciated the conversation that we had on this issue. Like I told you at that meeting, I do commit to working with you on this issue.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you, Mr. Clarkson?

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you, Senator. Also, I am very grateful for the time you spent with me, and I look forward to working with you and North Dakotans on a solution on the section line issue. Absolutely.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you. It is a very, very important issue to our State, so I appreciate that. The Commodity Credit Corporation courses under the preview of this Committee, but also under the Ag Appropriations Committee as well, which I chair. That is a vital tool that we use to help our farmers, whether it is low prices, whether it is weather, trade agreements, even not having a farm bill, you know, with updated reference prices and the things that we need in the countercyclical safety net. This is a vital tool.

I want you to each please address. Will you speak to the importance of the CCC in terms of funding that network, and making sure that we continue to have small family farms and ranches across this country that do not control their own destiny against all of these forces?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, as you know, I served on the board of the Commodity Credit Corporation during the President's first term. I am very familiar with its work and the import of every dollar that is spent through that unique vehicle that the Department of Agriculture has. I know there are many other agencies that would love to have a version of the Commodity Credit Corporation.

When I think about the important work that it does, I think about my fellow Tennessee farmers back home, several of whom are here today, especially in the overflow room for today's hearing. When they go to their USDA FSA offices, they may not know it, but they are on the form, it is noting that many of the programs are actually funded by under the auspices of the Commodity Credit Corporation. It is those funds that help ensure that they can remain on the farm and even pass it on to the next generation.

I am quite well aware of how important the funding mechanism is, the Commodity Credit Corporation is, as a whole, to the mission of USDA. If confirmed, I look forward to getting back involved in its efforts.

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. I do not have much to add to what Judge Vaden has shared, but I would note, too, that I appreciate CCC is an awesome tool for the Secretary, and with that power comes responsibility to work collabo-

ratively and openly with Congress on substantial matters on which the CCC may take action.

Senator HOEVEN. Right. We have used it, for example, when we set up the Market Facilitation Program, you never know what is going to come along, but we need to be ready, and that tool has to be there. Do you both agree with that?

Mr. VADEN. One hundred percent, Senator.

Mr. CLARKSON. Absolutely, Senator.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you. In the Farm Bill, of course, I want to thank Secretary Rollins for standing up the emergency program in line with what we intended when we passed the emergency assistance at the end of the year, along with an extension on the Farm Bill. We ask that that be stood up. In, you know, roughly three months she has done that. She used the WIP Plus program, which is exactly what we wanted. I really want to commend her. That is how it is supposed to work.

We appreciate you coming on board. She needs your assistance. She needs more folks on board. We need get you all confirmed, but we got to get this Farm Bill done. Right? That will help. We have got to get the Farm Bill done. The keys to that Farm Bill, in my opinion, are enhancing crop insurance to make it more affordable, both at the enterprise level and with the supplemental coverage option, and updating reference prices in the countercyclical safety net.

Do you agree with that, and feel those are key items to have in the Farm Bill? Will you support the efforts to get that done, each of you?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator the farm safety net needs to reflect the actual cost of production. It does not come anywhere close to that currently. I agree with you that it needs updating, and I look forward, if confirmed, to working with you on that.

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. I agree with your formulation, and I look forward to leveraging the resources of OGC to ensure that you have all of the technical assistance needed.

Senator HOEVEN. Okay. Then, the last question I have for each of you is that in our State, and in Senator Klobuchar's and Senator Smith's States, the sugar beet industry, sugar industry is a huge industry, not only in terms of the growers in both States, but also all the processing that we do. It is a many, many billion-dollar industry in the Red River Valley of the North.

Do you understand the Sugar program, how it works, and the importance of it? Will you continue to support and enforce it for each of you?

Mr. VADEN. The answer to all those questions is yes. Senator, I was involved when I was General Counsel in the first term managing that program. I am familiar with it, and I would look forward to working with you on it to ensure it is properly managed forward as Congress has stipulated in statute.

Mr. CLARKSON. Yes, Senator, I look forward to enforcing the law.

Senator HOEVEN. All right. Again, well, Mr. Clarkson enforcing, but beyond that, supporting our efforts here, you recognize the importance of the program and supporting it.

Mr. CLARKSON. I do. Yes, Senator.

Senator HOEVEN. Okay. Again, to both of you, thank you. Again, the Secretary's off to a great start. She needs more of you onboard to get these things done on behalf of our farmers and ranchers. Thank you both for being here today. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Thank you, Senator Hoeven. Senator Luján.

Senator LUJÁN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our Ranking Member as well, for holding this hearing. Welcome to both of you here today as well.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I have been chatting with constituents quite a bit at home, whether it is at the grocery store or in and around the communities that I am honored to represent, that I live in. I have been hearing a lot of concern. Folks that have been describing confusion around many of the programs that they count on from USDA.

There was an effort to slash a billion dollars in funding for schools and food banks to purchase local nutritious food to the ongoing threat of layoffs. It seems that things are getting harder for folks back home, especially farmers and ranchers who depend on these programs.

You know, these food programs that were cut, no one should forget that it is local food producers. Local farmers and ranchers are the ones selling them the food. When you decide to plant the seed and you are a farmer, you do not just do it because you had a dream about it. You plan for a year.

Last year, these farmers started talking to the food bank saying, "Well, what are you going to buy? What do you need? If I am going to sell to you, I got to make sure that my crops are going to be in place, that my planning schedule and all the rest." You all know this. Then at the 11th hour for the rug to be pulled from them. What are they supposed to do? Try to find some other buyers. What does that mean to the family, to the farm?

This is just no way to do things. I think especially farmers and ranchers, giving them time to plan. If a program's going to be cut, well, tell them it is going to be cut in three months, or in six months, or nine months, not in two days. There is a better way to do this stuff. Folks at home are not happy, including a lot of people that tell me they voted for this President. They are concerned. I hope that we can take those concerns to everyone that will listen to see how we can do better.

Now, Mr. Chairman, as you know, on this Committee, I have talked a lot about these things called acequias. These are earthen ditches. Go back hundreds of years in New Mexico and Southern Colorado. I still dig mine. Three feet wide, three feet deep. You have to burn the brush, you have to cut the edge, you have to get a shovel. Make it look real nice, because mom's going to come look at it and tell me if I clean it the way that dad taught me. If I do not, I have got to clean it again. It is not easy.

There was an effort going back to my time in the House to now previous farm bills. It has been two farm bills now that we were able to get some support for these irrigation systems back in New Mexico. I think USDA announced a \$15 million grant last year to help conserve much needed water because I mean, it is dirt from the mountains are with the snow, and it gets it to the farmers and all the rest. The grant agreement was signed last December. Yet,

the administration has refused to honor that grant award for these folks. I mean, these are all volunteers, farmers that they want to plant. They do not want paperwork.

Now, Mr. Vaden, yes or no, do you believe that USDA should honor agreements they have signed and award those funds immediately?

Mr. VADEN. Senator, I believe that USDA should follow the law. I am not familiar with the particular provisions of the grants that you cite, but obviously USDA should follow the law.

Senator LUJÁN. Are you familiar with some of the President's executive orders, Mr. Vaden.

Mr. VADEN. As they have been publicly reported. Yes.

Senator LUJÁN. I appreciate that. Do you feel that water conservation would be in violation of any of the executive orders that you are familiar with that have been publicly made available?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I have visited New Mexico many times, including when I was General Counsel, because the Office of General Counsel has an office in Albuquerque. As I am certain, you are aware, whenever I took a trip as General Counsel, I made certain to visit a national forest that was nearby during my time in New Mexico.

One of the national foresters there actually took me and showed me some of the water conservation measures that you have been talking about. I have seen them firsthand. I am aware of how important they are in that arid section of the country. Water conservation is obviously an issue that we need to pay particular attention to if the West is to continue to grow. I agree with you that it is important priority.

Senator LUJÁN. Amen to that sir, you said that better than I could. I appreciate that Mr. Vaden. One of the other concerns that I have been hearing from folks back home as it pertains to one of the executive orders, and I will just remind you that over 60 percent of the population and over 40 percent of the farmers and ranchers identify as Hispanic, Native American or another community back in New Mexico.

Now, the concerns that I am hearing, based on these executive orders targeting diversity initiatives is how it might impact those farmers and ranchers, and the programs that they rely on. One real concern is, will USDA continue to meet with these farmers and ranchers who make up New Mexico?

Yes or no, under President Trump's executive order, would USDA staff attending a meeting with Hispanic farmers be in violation of USDA's policy? I would ask both of you that question.

Mr. VADEN. Oh, merely attending a meeting. No, USDA should interact with, appreciate that farmer, regardless of what color their skin is or anything else. What a person's race is, should have no bearing whatsoever on the degree or ability of them to receive services from any Federal agency.

Senator LUJÁN. Get another amen from me, sir.

Mr. CLARKSON. I do not think I could say it much better than the Judge, Senator.

Senator LUJÁN. Thank you. You agree with that?

Mr. CLARKSON. I do, yes.

Senator LUJÁN. I appreciate that very much, and I certainly hope that that is something that is shared. Just getting to sit down and ask questions, things of that nature. There should not be a concern about that. I very much appreciate the clarity in your responses today. Would working with awarding funds or otherwise engaging with one of those associations, those irrigation associations be in violation of that USDA policy?

Mr. VADEN. Senator, I am not intimately familiar with all the details, but as you have described it, obviously working on water conservation measures, we have an entire agency that does nothing but that, the Natural Resources Conservation Service. I cannot imagine that interactions that go on, on a day-to-day basis would violate the executive order.

Senator LUJÁN. Anything you want to add sir?

Mr. CLARKSON. No. Much like Judge Vaden has said, I am not familiar with all of the details, but at the level of generality that you have used to describe it, I do not foresee an issue.

Senator LUJÁN. I appreciate that. I have many other questions, Mr. Chairman. I will submit them into the record.

Senator LUJÁN. God bless both of you. Thanks for being here. Thanks for your clarity on those responses as well. I think a lot of people at home are going to appreciate that when they see this as well. Appreciate that. Thank you.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Thank you, Senator Luján. Senator Justice.

Senator JUSTICE. Well, thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member. I would just like to just start off by saying that my family's been in the farming business for a long time, and we are still in the farming business. You would be really surprised to think that, I, myself, have probably planted and harvested hundreds of thousands of acres of row crops. I know a little bit about this.

We farm in multiple States, and I know a little bit about what goes on in multiple States. I thank you for welcoming my family, my bride, Kathy, of 700 years ago, and, and our wonderful daughter, and even little Babydog. I would just like to talk with you just at a level of a hundred thousand feet just for this moment. Let me just say just a few things.

Our farmers in this country today, our ranchers, our foresters, so many, many, many people are really hurting. They are really hurting. To say that they are challenged today, or to say that there is uncertainty around them today is such an understatement. That it is ridiculous. It is totally ridiculous.

Now, if we could step back, just step back from it and just say, well, what is he really talking about? Well, think about it. Think about just this, whether they be trade barriers, and I just wrote down a few, tariffs, input costs, machinery costs, nitrogen costs, natural gas, how it influences everything. You know, your fuel costs. Then, and then after you go through all that, what does a farmer do at night? He may sit there worrying about bugs or disease or, you know, dry weather or terrible, terrible rains. Absolutely, you cannot imagine what these people do for all of us, every single day, every day.

Now, I have been through this before, but all of us, you open the doors to Kroger's and food as far as you can possibly see. Let us

just step back and just think just for one second about the American farmer and what they give. Can you just imagine that on every American farmer's doorstep today, there is a bad actor that is trying to buy that land. What if they sell it? What if they do that? Where does it leave all of us? It leaves all of us in a tough spot. That is all there is to it. You better awaken to that.

Whether it be, I mean, that American farmer that is sitting out there, that is getting a return on what he is doing of almost nothing and driving a 12-year-old pickup truck, and he loves what he is doing so much that he does not want to leave for nothing. He does not want to leave that farm for nothing. Absolutely, it has been in his family for generation, after generation, after generation, and they love it beyond good sense and way beyond good financial sense.

The bad actors are standing there. All of us have got so much at stake here. It is unbelievable. We got to have a farm bill, sports fans, that is all there is to it. We have got to absolutely, all of us say, we are all in, we are all in, and we have got to do something about it.

Now, look, there is a great coach right here. Coach always says there is two great coaches. The best two coaches on the planet in the Senate. We are the only two. Maybe we are the best two. With all that being said, I am telling you, these two men right here are the real deal. I know it, and I have researched it. I am all in.

The last thing I would say is just this. Doug Burgum called me the other day, Secretary of Interior. We were talking, and here is what he said. He said, you know, I have got tens, and tens, and tens of thousands of employees in interior. Tens and tens and tens of thousands. Brooke Rollins is trying to do a great job. Our Chairman right here is trying to do a great job. They got to have the people. They got to have the people, and they got to have them confirmed, and they got to have them confirmed now.

Now, let me just end by just saying just this again, thank you for being kind to my family. I absolutely mean this with all my soul. We have got to do any and everything we possibly can to help our farmers, to help our ranchers. We have got to step up. If we do not step up America, we are going to regret it like you cannot imagine. All we have got to do is have those bad actors have enough control and we will pay, like you cannot imagine. It is time for us to step up America.

I do not have any questions for you. I absolutely know they are the best, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you so much for allowing me the time to talk. Now, I am going to go on to another Committee meeting, and I am going to take Babydog after that and get chicken nuggets. God bless each and every one of you. Thank you, sir.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Thank you, Senator Justice. Very well said. Senator Tuberville.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Senator Justice. Awesome, I just had my first picture taken with Babydog, so that I am excited. That made my day. I am glad you brought him up here today.

Senator JUSTICE. It is a girl, it is a girl.

Senator TUBERVILLE. It is a girl?

Senator JUSTICE. A big girl.

Senator TUBERVILLE. A big girl, yeah. Thank you, guys, for being here. As like Senator Justice says, my phone, I have had to put in a new phone line to the farmers. They are getting killed. It is almost over. I mean, it, you know, they cannot even see the light at the end of the tunnel. We need a farm bill. We need to help them. We need to understand the situation that we are in. Thank God for the tariffs, for President Trump. He is trying to right the ship. We will see what happens, but we have got to help our farmers.

Mr. VADEN, domestic peanut growers in my State and across the country have been at a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace due to non-tariff trade barriers on peanuts from aflatoxin that is in the European Union. Would you commit to ensuring USDA and the U.S. trade representatives, USTR, would work together on President Trump's agenda to reduce trade barriers and prioritize market access for our farmers?

Mr. VADEN. Absolutely. Senator, I know you just joined us, but earlier in response to a question from one of your colleagues, I noted that when it comes to American agriculture, oftentimes, the barriers that are actually keeping us out of the market are not formal tariffs. They are not taxes.

As you have noted with regard to your peanut farmers in Alabama, they are phony, phytosanitary concerns. Those concerns cannot be allowed—

Senator TUBERVILLE. What does that mean?

Mr. VADEN. That basically means a phony concern about a health issue.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Okay.

Mr. VADEN. Whether it be human health, or animal, and plant health. They use it as a barrier to keep our products out. Our products grown by American farmers are grown with the best technology, with the best scientific advancement. There should be no concern from any international purchaser that if they are buying American, they are getting anything other than the best. I will have no problem, sir, voicing this to the President's trade team.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. This is for both of you. The Biden Administration made individuals reliant on the SNAP Program, and the Federal Government to provide for them. SNAP should be a hand-up, not a hand-out, and we need to get Americans back to work. I think we all agree with that. A big part of this is due to the Biden Administration's 21 percent increase in SNAP benefits through the Thrifty Food Plan update amounting to over \$250 billion in spending without congressional authority.

Do either of you have ideas on how to enforce existing work requirements for SNAP recipients?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I think your question points out something very important. The work requirement that is contained of within SNAP is not voluntary. It is a statutory mandate passed by this Congress, and failing to enforce the work requirement is not a policy choice. It is a choice not to enforce the plain text of a law that Congress has passed.

I appreciate you pointing out that the purpose of SNAP should be gauged on not how many people are on it at any given period of time, but rather as you have pointed out, how successful the program is at giving people a helping hand when they need it, and

then working to transition them to self-sufficiency and entering the workforce so that they can become self-sustaining members of society.

That is really how we ought to be judging the success of SNAP, how successful it is in helping people make that transition. The work requirement is an important part of that.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you.

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. I think the Judge laid it out perfectly. Perora made very clear that there are work requirements associated with SNAP. I would also note on my wife's behalf, who is an Auburn graduate, War Eagle. I would be remiss if I did not share that today.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you. We all want to take care of people that need them, that are needy. We really want to take care of them, everybody. The problem is, we are like a business, and we run this thing too far. There is not going to be any money for anybody. We are going to be dead broke, and we are headed in that direction. We need to be a precursor for what is going on in this country and watch what is happening and understand that we need to help people, but we cannot help everybody just because they do not want to do anything.

At the end of the day, we have got to understand the significance of our debt and the direction that all these entitlements give out to. Again, we are a generous country. We always have been. I know you guys will do a great job. We are looking forward to voting for you. Now I will turn it over to my colleague here. I can see him coming and he is ready to go.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Senator Welch.

Senator WELCH. Thank you. That is my warmup act. Appreciate that, Coach. Thank you very much. One of the questions I have you had indicated that you were proud to outsource some of the OGC work on defaulting farm loans so USDA could more quickly foreclose on defaulted loans. I want to have you describe that. You know, during your previous tenure in the General Counsel's Office, did you privatize or streamline how farm loans were handled in the office? If so, can you explain what changes you made and how you saw these changes as beneficial?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, obviously during my previous time as General Counsel, we do not want anyone to default on their loan. When the Federal Government gives a loan, we want them to pay it back in full with interest. Unfortunately, that does not happen every time. When a default happens, we have a duty to the taxpayer to ensure—

Senator WELCH. No, I know all that. I mean, I am just asking about that process. I get it that if you lend money, we would like to have it repaid. You do not need to explain that to me. The process is what I am asking about?

Mr. VADEN. Well, what we found was that it took the Office of General Counsel far longer to resolve a loan that had gone into default than it did the private sector. In the private sector, resolving defaulted loans are handled by law firms that specialize largely in nothing but that. They are expert in doing it. It is all that they do. I thought it would be a good idea to take that loan resolution effort, do what the private sector does, and have a contract process where—

by people could put in proposals to serve as USDA's agents to do this.

Senator WELCH. Let me—I get that. It is efficiency. There is an issue with private debt collectors and overly aggressive tactics. Is that something that you are concerned about?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, this was not debt collection in the sense that these were not people who were calling up harassing. This was an instance of—these are instances where the loan has been defaulted on and USDA must exercise its right to claim the collateral and sell it to preserve the principle that it loaned.

Senator WELCH. No, I—okay, maybe I am not being clear. I get that. You make a loan; you want it repaid. All right. Some farmers have through circumstances beyond their control, had trouble, have trouble sometimes repaying those. A bank will, oftentimes, a private sector entity works with that debtor understanding that debtor does have an obligation, but work with them. Judgments have to be made about whether it is feasible to work something out that allows that debtor A, to keep the farm and, B, repay the loan.

The concern I have is that the private sector generally has a pretty ruthless goal. That is collect the loan so that they make money as opposed to, in many cases, a private bank that both wants to collect the loan because they have a duty to their shareholders, their depositors, but they also want to keep that farm going if at all. Is it all possible?

I am asking you to tell me what kind of steps or monitoring you are going to take to give the opportunity for someone, a farmer who through no fault of his or her own, has defaulted but wants to get back on track.

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I thank you for the clarification in your question. Of course. The Office of General Counsel only takes over when the agency, usually the Farm Services Agency in this case, has determined that efforts of the—like that you have described either would not be successful or have not been successful.

It is not the Office of General Counsel that makes the initial determination to go to resolve the defaulted loan. The loan is instead referred to the Office of General Counsel after the agency has made a determination that the steps that you suggested either have not worked or will not work.

Senator WELCH. Wait, so there is no capacity in the office part of the Office of the General Counsel in the process of working with the debtor, the farmer, as information comes up to go back to USDA and say, "Look, we got a situation here. We may be able to work it out"?

Mr. VADEN. Well, the relationship is held between, of course, the county office and the farmer. They are the experts when it comes to servicing the loan, the longtime relationship that they have with the loan holder in many cases. They are the frontline people who service the loan. It only gets turned over to the Office of General Counsel if there is a legal question in terms of what the loan actually allows or does not allow, or if there is a decision made by the agency that further efforts would be futile.

Senator WELCH. You are sort of hands off is what I am hearing on this question of whether some kind of workout arrangement would be accomplished.

Mr. VADEN. Well, I am in favor of workout arrangements. What I am clarifying is that that is not handled by the Office of General Counsel in the first instance. That is handled by the Farm Services Agency?

Senator WELCH. Okay. I just, Mr. Chairman, I do think that debts have to be repaid. I think nobody more than farmers understand that. I mean, they have to borrow money and they are good in their word. If they are not able to repay it, oftentimes it is through circumstances beyond their control.

I am not asking for a write off, but I am asking for serious efforts to work with farmers who were in a pretty tough situation. Maybe because of weather events or commodity price collapse. My hope is somehow, someday, that would be part of the equation. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Thank you. Senator Marshall.

Senator MARSHALL. Well, thank you Chairman, and welcome to our nominees. My first question is going to be for Judge Vaden. Judge, my family goes back family farms 100 years. I think yours were even 100 years older than my family's. I would like to think that my great-grandfather, your great-great-great where the original conservationist. That they wanted to leave others world cleaner, healthier, and safer than we found it, just like you and I want to leave it for our future generations cleaner, healthier, and safer than we found it.

I also note, though, that my farmers and ranchers depend upon certain pesticides and fertilizers, and there is a great opportunity, I think, for precision agriculture. We are going more with less every day. In your office, if confirmed, how can you help defend the crop protection and precision Ag tools that our farmers rely upon?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I thank you for the question, and I really appreciate how you have linked, because I think the linkage is proper conservation with the scientific advancements and chemicals that make that possible. No-Till agriculture was kind of launched in West Tennessee. I grew up going with my father to the Milan No-Till Festival, which still goes on, and was kind of an initial effort at evangelizing this notion that you do not have to plow the field every year, which, as you know, is bad for soil health.

That only becomes possible if you have in your toolkit as a farmer, the amazing chemicals that are provided in order to clear the land so that you can plant. If you take those chemicals away, what you are doing is you are taking a tool out of the toolkit of the farmer and requiring him to revert, in my view, to the somewhat antiquated plow. That is bad for soil health and quite frankly, it threatens a lot of the work done by the old Soil Conservation Service and now the Natural Resources Conservation Service to instill best practices in farms. Because as you know, if you are destroying the soil, it is the equivalent of eating into your principle to pay living expenses. It is going to bite you very quickly with time, you are destroying your most valuable assets. Assets, judge.

Senator MARSHALL. Judge are you committed to help protecting, to make sure the guardrails are loose enough, though, that our farmers do have access to the tools that they need and again, always with an eye toward conservation?

Mr. VADEN. Exactly. One of the things that impressed me is how thorough the Environmental Protection Agency is when they study these tools and the labels that they put on them are quite prescriptive, and they are prescriptive for a reason. It is because we care about the environment and we do not want to do undue harm to them. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing work with other agencies to ensuring farmers have the tools that they need.

Senator MARSHALL. Thanks. Let us go to Mr. Clarkson for my next question. Let us talk about the CCC for a second. It has been used for different purposes, and I was concerned with the last administration that the Secretary of Agriculture used it to promote Green New Deal-type of initiatives which I think feels like, to me, was outside of the intention of the CCC.

Do you think that the use of the CCC by the previous administration was legal? How do we ensure that the CCC is used for its intended use of supporting farmers and not backing special interest?

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. I do think that the prior administration's use of CCC required quite a bit of legal creativity that strained the statutory text and practice in a manner that I do not think I anticipate count and saying were I confirmed as General Counsel?

Senator MARSHALL. Okay. Thank you. Let us go back to Judge Vaden and talk about Proposition 12 for a second. Proposition 12 dictates, you know, in my humble opinion, tries to tell Kansas farmers how to grow pigs. It is really hard for that small producer if Kansas, or if call it California, has a way they want us to grow them, if Texas has a way we want to grow them, if Ohio has the way they want to grow pigs. It is really hard for my small producers. Is there anything that USDA could do to administratively ensure that certain States are not able to dictate production standards for livestock producers nationwide?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I am well aware of the challenge that such State propositions provide to farmers who have to operate in a national market. As you know, when I was General Counsel, we were very active in supporting the efforts of those who challenged the proposition.

I am happy to say those efforts ended up to be bipartisan, because though it is not frequently noted, both the first Trump Administration and the Biden Administration both opposed in the Federal courts Proposition 12 on the grounds of our and their belief that it violated the dormant commerce clause.

The Supreme Court unfortunately came to a different conclusion, and in the opinion written by the Supreme Court, they basically put it in Congress's hands, and said that Congress has the power under the Commerce clause to stop this if it wants.

When it comes to any administrative authorities that USDA might have, if any are in existence, they would have to be given to us by Congress.

Senator MARSHALL. Okay. Let us see here. Mr. Clarkson, would you have anything to add on the comment on the Proposition 12 issue?

Mr. CLARKSON. Nothing substantively. Just that the Office General of Counsel stands ready to help this Committee in the event

that it wants additional language or technical assistance on a potential fix.

Senator MARSHALL. Okay. Judge Vaden, I will close with my question for you. Dealing with our trade deficit, \$1.2 trillion trade deficit for the first time in my lifetime, an agriculture deficit, we are importing more food than we are exporting. You probably are as knowledgeable as anybody in this room is, if not on Capitol Hill, on international trade policies. In your new role, what can you do to decrease the international trade deficit, and how will you be promoting strengthening domestic demand for agriculture products?

Mr. VADEN. Senator, I think you hit on it in the verbs you used in your questions. We have got to promote, and that involves a salesmanship activity. I know the Secretary has committed to visiting six countries this year in terms of promoting more Ag experts. That is important. No one else is going to sell our stuff. We have got to sell it.

Second, we have got to keep track of foreign trade barriers, whether they be tariff-or non-tariff-related. We have got to remind the trade team that as they are out there looking for new trade deals, as they are standing up for other American industries, they need to stand up for American agriculture, too, and oppose these efforts that are trying to keep our wonderful farmers' products out of the international market.

Senator MARSHALL. Great. I look forward to sitting down, have a cup of coffee, and discussing the Canadian milk policy. You can explain that one to me someday. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Probably a long meal rather than a cup of coffee. Senator FISCHER. Senator WARNOCK. I apologize.

Senator WARNOCK. I would be happy to have you follow Canadian milk policy. Thank you, Chair Boozman. USDA has a long and unfortunate history of racial discrimination against minority farmers, and this has been well documented. In fact, USDA has been sued a number of times over claims of discrimination by minority farmers in farm-lending programs. Mr. Vaden you are nominated to be number two senior official at USDA. As the number two official at USDA, are you familiar with the lawsuits?

Mr. VADEN. Yes, Senator, I am.

Senator WARNOCK. Thank you so much. Mr. Clarkson, you have been nominated to be the USDA's top lawyer. Same question. Are you familiar with these lawsuits?

Mr. CLARKSON. I am.

Senator WARNOCK. Mr. Vaden, do you agree that USDA has a well-documented record of racial discrimination against minority farmers?

Mr. VADEN. I do agree that there are court rulings that have found that. Yes, Senator.

Senator WARNOCK. Do you agree that there is a well-documented record of racial discrimination against minority farmers?

Mr. VADEN. Yes, Senator.

Senator WARNOCK. The courts after reviewing the record and a mountain of evidence have made it clear that USDA has in fact discriminated against minority farmers as you indicate. This disparity did not just happen decades ago. As recently as 2022, Black farm-

ers were denied USDA direct loans more than any other racial group. That is why today's efforts to increase equitable participation in our Farm-Lending program by farmers who have historically experienced discrimination are still so important.

For example, the 2501 Program, which receives mandatory funding from Congress helps maximize USDA's outreach efforts to help ensure underserved farmers can equitably participate in USDA's programs. Additionally, Congress has put in place mandatory set asides, cost-shares, and fee waivers for disadvantaged farmers in various USDA programs.

Mr. Vaden, if confirmed, will you follow congressional mandates to ensure that these programs are implemented as required by law, and at the funding levels appropriated by Congress?

Mr. VADEN. Senator, I will follow the law.

Senator WARNOCK. Mr. Clarkson, if confirmed as USDA's top lawyer, would you advise USDA to follow current law?

Mr. CLARKSON. In all instances, I will advise the Secretary to follow the law. Yes, Senator.

Senator WARNOCK. Okay. Moving on to the next topic. Tariffs. Last week, President Trump launched a trade war and imposed heavy tariffs on our trading partners and closest allies, which is really, in my view, a tax paid by Americans. Since then, the markets have seen a massive drop, and investors are losing confidence.

Mr. Vaden, you have been working as a judge on the Court of International Trade, correct?

Mr. VADEN. Yes, sir.

Senator WARNOCK. Is market uncertainty brought about by tariffs helpful or hurtful for our farmers?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I do not think market uncertainty is helpful for anyone, but the question is how long it goes on.

Senator WARNOCK. Can you care to say more about that?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, obviously, the market's adjusting to the current situation. I have to be careful what I say because my court could hear legal challenges with regard to the President's trade actions. Obviously, for any market participant, what you want is you want to know the price that you are going to get at the time you wish to sell, and that is what makes agriculture so unique.

When the farmer plants his crop in the field, he does not know what price he is going to get, and he is making a bet on the future. A bet the likes of which most other industries do not have to engage in. That is why this Committee's work is so important in providing help to those farmers so that they can continue to provide the food.

Senator WARNOCK. Well, I can tell you that farmers on the ground in Georgia right now are very worried. I am talking to them all the time. Zippy Duvall of the American Farm Bureau spoke to us a week or two ago, and he said that the folks that he represents are very concerned about uncertainty around their business.

As you point out, it is a very difficult business. The margins of profitability are already very narrow. There is a lot that you do not control; weather, that kind of thing. This uncertainty, we have seen this before. It happened during the first Trump Administration, and there was an effort to provide some relief to farmers at an

amount of \$28 billion of taxpayer money that had to go to help farmers out of this trade war. You said it depends on how long. They are dealing with this issue right now. Can you say anything in terms of your role there at USDA, if confirmed, that would give farmers in Georgia some assurance that this will not go on and on.

Mr. VADEN. Senator, my role, if confirmed as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture would be to be a voice within the administration so that they know what is going on and to transmit these farmers' concerns to the policymakers so that they can take them into account and make the policies that will hopefully over the long-term lead to rural prosperity.

Senator WARNOCK. What will you do to make sure farmers in Georgia are not harmed by the trade war?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, as the Secretary has publicly stated, she is going to watch the situation. She is very cognizant of the programs which you have referenced, which were run through the Commodity Credit Corporation in the President's first terms. If there is a need to step in, she has committed to doing so.

I take the Secretary at her word, and I think it is important that now we watch, wait, and see what happens. You have got to measure twice before you cut. I think that that is what she is wisely doing.

Senator WARNOCK. Well, you say measure once before you cut went or twice before you, you cut once. I am not sure that is what farmers felt last week when they heard these announcements. I think it felt very certain, very sudden, and erratic for that matter. Farmers are already operating on very, very narrow margins. They have been hard hit by recent disasters, that kind of thing.

Again, what assurances can you give me that I can pass on to the farmers in Georgia that you are paying attention to what they are dealing with right now on the ground? Because they are deeply concerned right now.

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator I have been a farmer myself, and I live in a community that is full of farmers. The concerns that your farmers are sharing with you, I have little doubt are not much different than what I am hearing when I am at home in rural Obion County, Tennessee. You can rest assured that those concerns will be heavily—

Senator WARNOCK. Let me ask you this. Do you think trade wars are good for farmers or bad for farmers?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I think it is difficult for me as a Federal judge to opine on whether I think a particular policy that might come before me as a judge is good or bad. I can say as a judge that I definitely see both sides of the equation.

Senator WARNOCK. All right. Well, I will opine. I think trade wars are bad for farmers. Thank you so very much.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Senator Fischer.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today and putting yourselves forward to serve your country.

Judge Vaden, thank you for taking time to visit with me last week. I really appreciated in you mentioning that, if confirmed, you would view one of your roles as being an ambassador for agriculture and rural America throughout the government.

You and I talked about the importance of trade for Nebraska's Ag economy, and the impact that retaliatory tariffs can negatively have on our State. How would you advise the Secretary and work with the rest of the administration to protect our Ag producers from negative impacts of retaliation? Importantly, what steps would you advise to help our Ag producers to get that access to new markets?

We remember the previous administration left this country with a huge trade deficit, \$49 billion. We want to change the course there. How are we going to deal with the tariffs, which you are hearing a lot about, but also, how do we work together across government, again, as we talked about in my office, to be able to promote access to new markets and develop the new trade that we so desperately need with agriculture, but also with manufacturing?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I appreciate the time that you kindly gave me to sit with you and talk about these concerns as they affect the farmers there in Nebraska.

When it comes to the role of the Department of Agriculture, I think you hit on the word that is correct; the Ambassadorial role. Thanks to this Committee, we now have a mission area and an Under Secretary that has as his full-time job trying to open up markets for trade. That is our Under Secretary for Trade in Foreign Agricultural Affairs.

When I served in the first Trump Administration, one of the first things that I did when I came into the department was to help then Secretary Perdue stand up that area. We have an outstanding nominee for that position. I know he will soon be before this Committee. I hope that this Committee will confirm him quickly as well, so that he can aid Secretary Rollins as she has announced six visits to international markets, that it is vital that we open up to more American agricultural production.

That Ambassadorial role is not limited to going and visiting foreign partners, as you know. As you quite rightly noted in your question, it is also important that we act as an ambassador to our fellow cabinet agencies and remind them that the policies that they are considering have effects in rural America that may differ from those that they have in metropolitan areas of the country, and work with them to ensure that the policies that they seek to enact do not have unforeseen negative consequences in rural America. I have never had a problem picking up the phone and calling a friend at another cabinet agency. If confirmed, you have my word that I will be working those phones once again.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you. We also talked about the importance of Ag research during our conversation and making sure that that research is going to be aligned with the producer's needs. The focus should be on producer's needs. We have been working for several years on an Ag research service facility that will be co-located at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I look forward to working with you on that so that we can get that completed.

This is a facility that can really highlight how USDA works in collaboration with our land-grant universities and private industry to drive that innovative research that is needed. Could you talk a little bit about USDA's role in Ag research ecosystem, and thoughts that you have on how we can improve ARS?

Mr. VADEN. Well, our research, economic, and education mission area is vital to the future of agriculture. The work that is done there literally plants the seeds for profits that are to come in the future. As you noted, it is vital that that research be laser-focused on the needs of those who are engaged in production agriculture. That is the key constituency that we serve at the Department of Agriculture, and that is what our research should be focused on. That goes not just for the Agricultural Research Service, but for the Economics Research Service, and all of the other agency components of the REE mission area.

Senator FISCHER. Thank you, Judge. Thank you, Mr. Clarkson. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman BOOZMAN. Thank you, Senator Fischer. I am going to go vote in a second. That is the only thing we have got to do around here is vote. They called a vote a while ago. I am going to turn things over to Senator Klobuchar and then Jerry Moran is coming back. He had to go vote. He is on his way back to ask questions.

It should be just a minute or two. Again, I want to thank you all for being here. I think you did an excellent job today. As always, I want to thank our staff and Senator Klobuchar's staff the great work of making all of this happen. Again, thank you. Senator Klobuchar.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. [Presiding.] Thank you. I want to talk a little bit about the rule of law that has been advanced in other committees before other nominees. I just want to make very clear that if an executive order were directly opposed to binding Supreme Court precedent, do you believe the USDA can follow that executive order? I guess I would start with you, Mr. Clarkson.

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. In the event there is Supreme Court precedent that is on all fours with whatever the issue is, then the Supreme Court precedent would likely control.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Thank you. I see that Senator Schiff, speaking of law, has just arrived. If you are you ready to go, Senator Schiff?

Senator SCHIFF. Yes, I am.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Very good.

Senator SCHIFF. Thank you. Mr. Vaden, I wanted to ask you about the specialty crop challenges that we face in California, and in particular, if there is a Tariff Relief Fund that is established during the first Trump Administration, when there was such a fund, specialty crop farmers really did not participate very heavily, and those in California participated even less.

I would love to get your thoughts on how we can address that. If there is going to be another fund that is established, how do we make sure that there is some equitable distribution of resources so that specialty crop farmers also can make use of it.

What do you think accounted for the kind of disparate use of those funds previously? Are there barriers to specialty crop farmers being able to access the program because of how the program is structured? Are there other reasons why there was relatively low participation?

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, I appreciate the question, and I also want to thank your staff for sparing some time for me to talk with them late last week.

Your State's agricultural bounty is unique in our country. I saw that firsthand when I visited, when I was General Counsel and watched them put in among other things, a tomato crop. That is something you do not get in West Tennessee. At the Department of Agriculture, we have got to keep in mind that we are in favor of all farmers, regardless of what crop it is that they are putting in the ground, whether it is a traditional row crop or a specialty crop. We need to be in favor of all of them because we want all of them to succeed.

When it comes to your question about prior programs, anything I would say would be speculation. One thing comes to mind in particular, because there are so many traditional agricultural programs that are available to row crop farmers. They are very knowledgeable and used to interacting with USDA and the FSA county offices.

There are many fewer such programs available for specialty crop farmers. They may not be as knowledgeable when it comes—when there are programs that come available as to how one signs up and how the Farm Services Agency process works. That may indicate that there is education that needs to be done when there are opportunities for money to go out.

For me, when I think about American agriculture, it makes no difference to me whether it is one of your wonderful farmers in the Central Valley, or whether it is someone growing row crops in the Midwest, or whether it is a livestock operation somewhere. They are all farmers, and we should support them all.

Senator SCHIFF. Well, I appreciate that, and I would love to work together to make sure that if there is such a program established again, that we make sure the specialty crop farmers can participate. I know that a number of them were deeply impacted by tariffs in the first Trump Administration.

Depending on the longevity of these tariffs, they may be deeply impacted again and would welcome the chance to work together to try to address that issue, and frankly, even beyond the tariff issue. Just to make sure that specialty crop farmers get the attention that they need and deserve. A lot of the research efforts, the marketing programs that analyze new ways of preventing infestations and disease, but also that help specialty crop farmers market around the world. I want to make sure those programs are robust and keep that industry very healthy.

I thank you, and I will yield back.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much. I appreciate this. I think we are going to just take a little recess while we wait for Senator Moran. That is what we are going to do. We will wait a minute. Thank you.

[Recess.]

Senator MORAN. [Presiding.] The Senate Committee on Agriculture will come back to order. There is a lesson for me to be learned. I went from that end of the table to this end of the table. There is hope in the Senate that you can arise maybe to the occasion, but hopefully longer-term than that. I am pleased to be back

and on the Ag Committee, and I am pleased to sit wherever I am assigned to sit during the Committee hearings.

I thank both of these witnesses for being here. I want to just ask a couple of questions, and then I will check with Senator Klobuchar, and we will conclude the hearing. You and I, Judge Vaden, had a conversation in my office that I want to reiterate. You were engaged in efforts in the earlier Trump Administration in regard to location of Department of Agricultural Agencies in places outside of Washington, DC. One of the places that that occurred was in Kansas City, Missouri, perhaps a few miles off course, but in our neighborhood.

What I discovered was that while the Biden Administration Secretary Vilsack did not overturn that decision, he really did not enforce it, and that most of the employees who work in those two offices appear remotely. I would like to know your reaction, and then I would like to hear generally what plans you are aware of, or would encourage, or support that deal with other agencies and their location outside the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

Mr. VADEN. Well, Senator, you are correct that as General Counsel, I was involved in providing legal advice, which made the move of those two agencies possible to the Kansas City area. Those two agencies, NIFA and ERS, are vital to the work of the Department of Agriculture, but they are more importantly, vital to the work of rural America. I think it is a good thing that they are located out in rural America, closer rather to the people whom they serve.

It has been publicly announced that the National Institutes of Food and Agriculture has a new director, that is Dr. Jaye Hamby. He has been on the job for a short period of time, but as Dr. Hamby is a proud Tennessean, I have come to know him. I know that one of the first things that he did, he even postponed one of his orientation sessions, Senator, in order to do this, was to fly out to Kansas City and to welcome the employees of his agency when they were brought back to the office, there in Kansas City. To welcome them, let them know their work was valued, and let them know that they are in Kansas City.

They are a vital part of USDA. That important first step taken by Dr. Hamby and his new role as Director, I think bodes well for that agency's future in the Kansas City area.

Senator MORAN. I appreciate that answer, and I look forward to working with you and with him in that regard, and apparently the General Counsel as well.

Again, Judge Vaden, food aid is an important component of, in my view, our moral responsibilities as well as economic benefit to farmers and ranchers. I met this weekend with a half a dozen agricultural groups leadership in Kansas to talk about the circumstance that we want to accomplish in regard to trade.

I would highlight for you that they indicated that the steps that need to be taken now while we are imposing trade and perhaps using that as leverage, is to rapidly begin the process of negotiating trade agreements, bilateral trade agreements with countries around the world. If confirmed, but in the meantime, between now and then, if you would convey that one of the things that they indicated to me that is worthy of remembering that the agricultural

economy is in more difficult circumstances today than it was in 2018 when the tariff battles occurred.

While I know there is talk of compensating for the losses that farmers may undertake because of these trade and tariff issues, we need to be reminded that with drought and the circumstances that we have had in many places in the country, interest rates, input costs, the ability actually to borrow money, that farmers face more serious challenges.

Again, I would highlight one of their suggestions is let us quickly begin looking for markets for our commodities, and in some circumstances, meaning using the trade—I am sorry, the tariffs as leverage to get those accomplished.

Then, I want to highlight Food for Peace. I have got a long Kansas history of the Food for Peace Program. A farmer at a Farm Bureau meeting in Cheyenne County, Kansas was wondering why grain—he saw grain stacked at his grain elevator that was going to waste and brought forth to a Farm Bureau county meeting the idea of why cannot we find a way to feed people who are hungry? Dwight Eisenhower and others from Kansas were leaders at the time, and Food for Peace came into play.

Bob Dole, generally known as a champion for Food for Peace, a Senator from Kansas reauthorized the program. It is not part of the Department of Agriculture. You may wonder why I am raising this to you. It is raising to the two of you because you are so influential now and in the future that I would like your voice in this regard.

The farmers and farm groups that I visited with over the weekend also indicated that food aid is a component of their income as well. With Food for Peace, Senator Hoeven and I introduced legislation that would transfer—so, when the Department of State indicated that pause or demise of USAID, Senator Hoeven and I introduced legislation to move Food for Peace to the Department of Agriculture, where it used to be.

I have had conversations with the Secretary of Agriculture who seemed inclined to be supportive of that. We have had conversations with OMB and the White House aides all of which seemed sympathetic to that. It would be my understanding is that I started to say Senator Rubio, but Secretary of State, Senator Rubio, indicated that Food for Peace would remain at the State Department unless there was an agency or department that was interested in managing that program.

Everything I know about from those conversations, I indicated is that the Department of Agriculture is willing and, in my view, able to administer Food for Peace. If you would highlight for your future colleagues the importance of saying so publicly and within the administration that Food for Peace needs to have a future, and a future could very well be at USDA.

Then let me ask the future General Counsel. It has been my practice in a number of hearings to make certain that I have an appreciation, understanding of where those who are giving legal advice to a department would rest. We have had so many instances with when legal advice is provided, it touches on so many aspects of USDA operations, and I want to make certain that your legal advice is sound and consistent with the law. Nothing that you would

not want either, I am sure, but I would like for you to confirm to me that you are committed to following the letter of the law.

Mr. CLARKSON. Thank you for the question, Senator. In all instances, I am committed to following the letter of the law.

Senator MORAN. Let me ask just one further question that when a court rules what that law means, would your advice then be to the Department to follow the order or judicial decision of the court?

Mr. CLARKSON. Yes.

Senator MORAN. Senator Boozman is such a good politician that he is letting me enjoy the moment of my Chairmanship a moment longer. I would again thank on behalf of Senator Boozman and Senator Klobuchar. I thank Judge Vaden and Mr. Clarkson for appearing before our Committee, and our Committee Members for their participation in today's important hearing.

The record of this hearing will remain open for two business days, and the Committee is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:02 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

APRIL 8, 2025

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.

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and distinguished Senators of the Committee—

I first want to thank President Trump for the nomination to serve as the General Counsel at the United States Department of Agriculture. I had the great privilege to serve during the President's first term. It would be an honor to work on the President's behalf a second time. I also want to thank Secretary Rollins for her confidence in my ability to work as the agency's lead attorney. Secretary Rollins has laid out an ambitious agenda for USDA. I hope to have the chance to help Secretary Rollins implement her vision for USDA.

Thank you to this Committee for its consideration of my nomination. I am grateful for the opportunity to have met with several members of this Committee. During those discussions I heard firsthand about this Committee's priorities as well as the uncertainties facing U.S. agriculture and what USDA might do to mitigate such uncertainties.

And if I have the fortune to be confirmed, I look forward to working alongside the men and women at USDA who work each and every day on behalf of our nation's farmers, producers, and the broader American public.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay special thanks to my wife Kristin, my mom and dad, my sister Cami, and my wider family. I am indebted to each one of them and deeply appreciative of their unending support and love.

The chance to return to USDA and lead the Office of General Counsel presents a significant opportunity to help this nation's farmers and producers. Prior to serving at USDA in the President's first term, I would not have characterized myself as an ag person. But having spent nearly three years at the Department, I learned about agriculture and the great sacrifice many of our farmers and producers make to feed this country. Farmers, ranchers, and producers not only create a great bounty for this country, but also these individuals establish a stability and rootedness in the body politic. It is our farms that offer a glimpse of American life across generations. It is our farms that promise a just reward for a hard day's work. And it is our farms that preserve a rural way of life in this country. These are all things worth protecting.

Too often many take this country's healthy, affordable, and abundant food supply for granted. And in this moment, that blessing faces many challenges. Dynamic consumer preferences, foreign market access, regulatory uncertainty, access to credit, and weather are just a few of the challenges facing our agriculture sector.

Congress has equipped USDA with tools to stand alongside farmers and producers in the face of such turbulence. And while the Office of General Counsel does not set policy, OGC can play a substantial role in advising the Secretary and USDA's mission areas on available legal authorities to respond to these adversities.

In my first stint at the Department, I saw firsthand how much OGC can contribute to a sense of regulatory certainty. OGC plays an outsized role in the Department's rulemaking efforts. I aspire to counsel the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary, and the mission area Undersecretaries on

how to ensure we achieve the President's policy goals while at the same time fortifying final rulemakings against inevitable challenges. OGC's close involvement on major rulemakings creates the best possible conditions for the President's deregulatory agenda. The President's agenda will free our farmers from unnecessary or anachronistic regulatory burdens. The President's agenda will incentivize advances in agriculture technology, including precision ag and biotechnology. And the President's agenda will best position our farmers and producers to compete. An OGC that delivers on the President's agenda is an OGC that does justice for our farmers and producers. If I am confirmed, I will work each day on behalf of the President and the Secretary for the betterment of our farmers and producers.

Again, I thank this Committee for its consideration of my nomination. And I look forward to answering your questions today.

**DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE
RECORD**

APRIL 8, 2025

April 8, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman
Chair, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar:

I write to express my strong support for the nomination of the Honorable Stephen Alexander Vaden to serve as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

Having served as the General Counsel of the United States Department of Agriculture ("USDA") from 2005 – 2008 under the leadership of Secretary Johanns, Acting Secretary Conner, and Secretary Schafer, I have firsthand knowledge of the qualities necessary for effective leadership of the Department. I also have known Judge Vaden for quite a few years. We both hail from West Tennessee, both clerked for the same federal judge, and both had the high honor of serving as the chief legal officer of the Department.

I can say without hesitation that Judge Vaden is absolutely the right choice to serve as Deputy Secretary at this important moment in our history. I say this not because of any specific policy choices he will or will not pursue, but rather because he is a man of high integrity with a demonstrated commitment to American agriculture who will work tirelessly to ensure that USDA operates effectively and in the service of American farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses and consumers.

Judge Vaden has achieved extraordinary professional heights -- graduating from Yale Law School, earning prestigious federal clerkships, and working in top notch law firms. He has proven that he could chart any professional course of his choosing. With all that he could do, what is most impressive to me is that Judge

Vaden will always be a “farm kid” who remains rooted in agriculture and public service. Whether in Nashville, New Haven, D.C. or New York, he has maintained his ties to rural Tennessee and production agriculture. And there is no more true and telling sign of his commitment to American agriculture than his willingness to leave a lifetime appointment to the federal bench to serve the Department he loves.

The United States Department of Agriculture deserves a Deputy Secretary who knows how to get things done and who can work well with people and will treat them with respect. I have had the occasion to visit Judge Vaden’s chambers and seen the way he is admired by his clerks and respected by his colleagues.

For these reasons and more, I respectfully urge the Committee to swiftly advance Judge Vaden as our next Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. If he is given the opportunity to serve, his experience, intellect, and commitment to American agriculture will allow him to make all our lives better.

Thank you for your consideration and for your leadership of this Committee.

With highest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Kesselman', with a stylized, flowing script.

Marc L. Kesselman
Former USDA General Counsel (2005 – 2008)



**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT of
AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY**

MIKE STRAIN, DVM Commissioner

March 6, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman
Chair, Senate Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar:

I am writing today in strong support of the swift confirmation of Judge Stephen Alexander Vaden as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Secretary-designate.

Judge Vaden is no stranger to the USDA, having previously served as General Counsel during President Trump's first term. During his nearly four years as head of the Office of General Counsel, he successfully supervised over 250 legal professionals across thirteen offices throughout the United States. His deep understanding of American agricultural interests makes him a highly qualified candidate for this crucial role.

A Tennessee native, Judge Vaden grew up working on his family farms along the Kentucky-Tennessee border. He attended Vanderbilt University for his undergraduate studies, and he earned his juris doctor from Yale Law School. His impressive legal career includes two prestigious clerkships along with experience at two of America's top law firms. Since late 2020, Judge Vaden has served as a judge on the United States Court of International Trade, further enriching his extensive legal expertise.

In addition to his professional qualifications, Judge Vaden continues to manage his family farm, allowing him to intimately understand the struggles and triumphs of agriculture and rural life. His appreciation for the farmers, ranchers, and growers who sustain our nation is evident in his commitment to serving their interests. With a proven track record of delivering results, particularly during President Trump's administration, he is uniquely qualified to assist Secretary Rollins in steering the USDA toward a future that prioritizes farmers and strengthens agricultural innovation.

Judge Vaden possesses the intellect, experience, and genuine passion necessary to excel as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. For the sake of our farmers and the future of American agriculture, he deserves swift confirmation. His sharp legal mind and nuanced understanding of complex policy issues will undoubtedly benefit the USDA and the agricultural community at large.

I urge your committee, and the entire U.S. Senate, to expediently confirm Judge Vaden as the 16th Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mike Strain", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mike Strain, DVM
Commissioner

cc: Honorable John Thune, Senate Majority Leader
Honorable Charles E. Schumer, Senate Minority Leader

March 4, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar:

We write to express our strong support for the nomination of Stephen Alexander Vaden as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. As representatives of farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, cooperatives, state departments of agriculture, processors, growers, and conservationists, we believe that Judge Vaden's extensive experience and deep-rooted commitment to American agriculture make him exceptionally well-qualified to serve in this critical leadership role at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

A native of Union City, Tennessee, Judge Vaden grew up working with his father on his family's diversified row crop farm, instilling in him a lifelong passion for agriculture. This passion has guided his impressive career, which spans agriculture, law, and public service. His academic credentials include a law degree from Yale University, and his professional background includes time at two prominent law firms and two federal clerkships.

Judge Vaden has already demonstrated outstanding leadership within USDA. During his tenure as General Counsel from 2017 to 2020, he supervised over 250 legal professionals across 13 offices, providing guidance on matters vital to the agricultural community. His accomplishments included successfully litigating two cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, implementing key provisions of the 2018 farm bill, and leading the development of critical regulations for the sale of hemp and bioengineered product labeling.

Currently serving as a judge on the United States Court of International Trade, Judge Vaden brings a unique understanding of agriculture's role in international markets. His work addressing federal trade issues, including those involving agricultural commodities, will be indispensable as USDA continues to navigate global trade challenges and create a level playing field and expanded opportunities for U.S. farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses.

Judge Vaden's qualifications are further underscored by his prior Senate confirmations—both as General Counsel for USDA and as a federal judge.

We are confident that Judge Vaden's leadership alongside Secretary Brooke Rollins will ensure USDA remains a strong advocate for farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, and rural communities. His deep understanding of the agricultural economy, regulatory landscape, and global trade dynamics will be instrumental as the department works to address challenges such as stabilizing the farm economy, strengthening supply chains, and implementing a new farm bill.

We urge your committee and the entire United States Senate to act swiftly to confirm Judge Stephen Vaden as the next Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. His leadership, experience, and dedication to American agriculture will make a profound impact on the success of our nation's farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses, and rural communities.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued support of American agriculture.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Retailers Association
 American Farm Bureau Federation
 American Feed Industry Association
 American Seed Trade Association
 American Soybean Association
 American Sugarbeet Growers Association
 CropLife America
 Farm Credit Council
 International Fresh Produce Association
 Meat Institute
 National Association of Conservation Districts
 National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
 National Association of Wheat Growers
 National Corn Growers Association
 National Cotton Council
 National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
 National Grain and Feed Association
 National Milk Producers Federation
 National Pork Producers Council
 National Sorghum Producers Association
 The Fertilizer Institute
 USA Rice
 Agribusiness Council of Indiana

Agricenter International
Agricultural Council of Arkansas
Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas
Alabama Agribusiness Council
Alabama Farmers Federation
Alabama Pork Producers
Almond Alliance
Amcot
American Association of Crop Insurers
American Cotton Shippers Association
American Livestock Markets and Dealers Association
American Pistachio Growers
American Sheep Industry Association
American Sugarbeet Growers Association
AmericanHort
Animal Health Institute
Arizona Cotton Growers Association
Arizona Crop Protection Association
Arizona Farm Bureau
Arizona Nursery Association
Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation
Arkansas Soybean Association
Berryman and Associates
Bush Hog, Inc
California Association of Winegrape Growers
California Citrus Mutual
California Farm Bureau
California Pork Producers Association
CEA Alliance
ClearPath Action
Colorado Farm Bureau
Connecticut Farm Bureau Association
Corn Refiners Association
Cotton Growers Warehouse Association
Cotton Warehouse Association of America
Council of Producers & Distributors of Agrotechnology

Crop Insurance and Reinsurance Bureau
Crop Insurance Professionals Association
Delaware Farm Bureau
Ducks Unlimited
Equine Sports Council
Farm Animal Care Coalition of Tennessee
Florida Citrus Mutual
Florida Farm Bureau Federation
Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association
FMI - The Food Industry Association
Forest Landowners Association
Georgia Farm Bureau
Global Cold Chain Alliance
Grain and Feed Association of Illinois
GROWMARK
Growth Energy
Idaho Dairywomen's Association, Inc.
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
Idaho Grain Producers Association
IL Corn Growers Association
Illinois Farm Bureau
Illinois Seed Trade Association, Inc.
Independent Bakers Association
Indiana Corn Growers Association
Indiana Farm Bureau, Inc.
International Dairy Foods Association
Iowa Farm Bureau
Iowa Pork Producers Association
Iowa Soybean Association
Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association
Kansas Farm Bureau
Kansas Grain and Feed Association
Kansas Sorghum Producers
Kansas Soybean Association
Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation
Livestock Marketing Association

Livestock Marketing Association of Texas
Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation
Maine Sheep Breeders Association
Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation
Massachusetts Forest Alliance
McCurdy Sod Farms LLC
Michigan Agri-Business Association
Michigan Farm Bureau
Michigan Soybean Association
Mid Atlantic Soybean Association
Middle TN Nursery Association
Midsouth Grain Association
Midwest Council on Agriculture
Midwest Dry Bean Coalition
Midwest Food Products Association
Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation
Minnesota Lamb & Wool Producers Association
Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation
Mississippi Land Bank, ACA
Mississippi River Trust
Missouri Farm Bureau Federation
Missouri Soybean Association
Montana Farm Bureau Federation
National Cotton Ginners Association
National Council of Agricultural Employers
National Fisheries Institute
National Grocers Association
National Oilseed Processors Association
NC Agribusiness Council
NCA - The National Confectioners Association
Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation
Nebraska Pork Producers Association
Nebraska Soybean Association
Nevada Farm Bureau Federation
New Jersey Farm Bureau
New York Farm Bureau

North American Blueberry Council
North American Renderers Association
North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation
North Dakota Corn Growers Association
North Dakota Soybean Growers Association
Northeast Dairy Producers Association
Northwest Horticultural Council
Nutrien
Ohio AgriBusiness Association
Ohio Farm Bureau
Ohio Pork Council
Ohio Soybean Association
Oklahoma Farm Bureau
Oregon Farm Bureau
Pennsylvania Farm Bureau
Pheasants Forever
Pillen Family Farms & DNA Genetics
Plains Cotton Growers, Inc.
Plant Based Products Council
Quail Forever
Second Harvest Food Bank of East Tennessee
Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association
Society of American Florists
South Carolina Corn and Soybean Association
South Dakota Farm Bureau
South Dakota Soybean Association
Southern Crop Production Association
Southwest Council of Agribusiness
Southwest Meat Association
Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts
Tennessee Beekeepers Association
Tennessee Cattlemen's Association
Tennessee Corn Growers Association
Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association
Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation
Tennessee Feed & Grain Assn

Tennessee Forestry Association
Tennessee Nursery & Landscape Association, Inc.
Tennessee Pork Producers Assn
Tennessee Sheep Producers Association
Tennessee Soybean Association
Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association
Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders Foundation
Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration
Texas Cattle Feeders Association
Texas Citrus Mutual
Texas Farm Bureau
Texas Forestry Association
Texas Grain & Feed Association
Texas International Produce Association
Texas Pork Producers Association
Texas Vegetable Association
Texas Watermelon Association
The Center for Dairy Excellence
The Poultry Federation
TN Dairy Producers Association
TN Poultry Association
U.S. Beet Sugar Association
U.S. Custom Harvesters, Inc.
U.S. Dairy Export Council
U.S. Durum Growers Association
US Rice Producers Association
Utah Farm Bureau Federation
Virginia Agribusiness Council
Virginia Farm Bureau
Walking Horse Report
Washington Apple Commission
Washington Farm Bureau
Washington State Tree Fruit Association
Western Growers
Western Peanut Growers Association
Wildlife Mississippi

Wilson County-Tennessee State Fair
Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation



April 7, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman
Chair, Senate Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar:

As leaders of State Departments of Agriculture, we are the primary individuals tasked with advancing and defending our state and regional agricultural interests, all of which contribute to a robust domestic food supply and economy. Our success heavily relies on having strong leadership at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). We write today in support of the swift confirmation of Deputy Secretary-designate, Judge Stephen Alexander Vaden.

Judge Vaden is a well-credentialed and familiar face in the fight for American agricultural interests. A Tennessee native, Judge Vaden grew up working on his family farms, straddling the Kentucky-Tennessee border. He received a top-flight education, first attending Vanderbilt University and then continuing to earn his juris doctor from Yale Law School. His legal career includes two prestigious clerkships, and experience at two of America's top law firms. Since the end of 2020, Judge Vaden has served as a judge on the United States Court of International Trade. He undoubtedly will bring a sharp legal mind and a nuanced understanding of the complex policy issues facing American agriculture to the USDA.

Judge Vaden is no stranger to the USDA, having served as General Counsel of the Department during President Trump's first term. During that nearly four-year tenure as head of the Office of General Counsel, Vaden supervised more than 250

April 7, 2025
Page 2 of 3

legal professionals in thirteen offices across the United States. Vaden's record also includes significant victories on the national stage. As General Counsel, he led the Department to victory in two cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, a rare feat that highlights his ability to tackle high-stakes challenges with precision and resolve. These wins reinforced USDA's authority and protected the interests of American agriculture, proving that Vaden is not just a thinker but a doer—someone who can translate principle into action.

Perhaps most compelling is Judge Vaden's personal connection to the land. Raised in Tennessee, where he still helps manage his family farm, he intimately understands the struggles and triumphs of rural life. This isn't just a job for him; it's a calling rooted in a deep appreciation for the farmers, ranchers, and growers who feed the nation. Following the Biden era, in which agricultural policy was clearly detached from the realities of the heartland, Judge Vaden's background ensures the voices of rural America will be heard at the highest levels of government. With a proven track record of legal expertise, a deep commitment to rural America, and a history of delivering results during Trump's first term, Judge Vaden is uniquely qualified to help Secretary Rollins steer the USDA toward a future that prioritizes farmers and strengthens agricultural innovation.

As the Senate considers Judge Vaden's nomination, lawmakers should see it for what it is: a chance to place a principled, capable, and dedicated advocate for agriculture in a position of influence. Judge Stephen Alexander Vaden has the intellect, the experience, and the heart to serve as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. For the sake of our farmers and the future of American agriculture, he deserves swift confirmation. As such, we urge your Committee, and the entire U.S. Senate, to expeditiously confirm Deputy Secretary-designate Vaden as the 16th Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



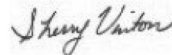
Wes Ward
Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture



Chris Chinn
Missouri Director of Agriculture



Wilton Simpson
Florida Commissioner of Agriculture



Sherry Vinton
Nebraska Director of Agriculture

April 7, 2025
Page 3 of 3



Tyler Harper
Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture



Blayne Arthur
Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture



Chanel Tewalt
Idaho Director of Agriculture



Hugh Weathers
South Carolina Commissioner of
Agriculture



Don Lamb
Indiana Director of Agriculture



Charlie Hatcher, DVM
Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture



Mike Naig
Iowa Secretary of Agriculture



Sid Miller
Texas Commissioner of Agriculture



Jonathan Shell
Kentucky Commissioner of
Agriculture



Kent Leonhardt
West Virginia Commissioner of
Agriculture



Andy Gipson
Mississippi Commissioner of
Agriculture

cc: Honorable John Thune
Honorable Charles E. Schumer

 **American Farm Bureau Federation**
600 Maryland Avenue, SW | Suite 1000W | Washington, DC 20024

ph. 202.406.3600
www.fb.org

April 7, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman, Senate Ag Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member, Senate Ag Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar:

On behalf of the American Farm Bureau Federation, we write to urge the Senate Ag Committee to swiftly confirm Tyler Clarkson as the next general counsel of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). His extensive experience in both the public and private sectors, coupled with his deep understanding of agricultural policy and regulatory matters, makes him an exceptionally qualified candidate for this critical role.

Mr. Clarkson's background is uniquely suited to the challenges facing USDA. He currently serves as vice president and deputy general counsel at Ginkgo Bioworks, a company at the forefront of genetic engineering across various industries, including agriculture. This experience provides him with a strong understanding of the innovative technologies shaping the future of agriculture.

Notably, Mr. Clarkson previously served at USDA in several key roles, including deputy general counsel, principal deputy general counsel and acting general counsel. During his tenure, he demonstrated a profound understanding of the department's operations and legal complexities. His experience also includes serving as counselor to the administrator at the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, where he focused on regulatory enforcement reform, showcasing his ability to navigate complex regulatory landscapes.

Given the current challenges facing American agriculture, including evolving regulatory frameworks, trade complexities and a weakened agricultural economy, Mr. Clarkson's expertise is essential. His understanding of both agriculture and regulatory processes will enable him to provide sound legal counsel and support USDA's mission effectively.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and your commitment to serving our nation's farmers and rural communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Zippy Duvall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "Z".

Zippy Duvall
President

cc: Members of the United States Senate

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Hon. Frederica S. Wilson, FL-24
Hon. Joyce Beatty, OH-03
Hon. Hakeem Jeffries, NY-08
Hon. Marc Veasey, TX-33
Hon. Robin Kelly, IL-02
Hon. Cory Booker, State of New Jersey
Hon. Alma Adams, NC-12
Hon. Stacey Plaskett, VI
Hon. Bonnie Watson Coleman, NJ-12
Hon. Dwight Evans, PA-03
Hon. Lisa Blunt Rochester, State of Delaware
Hon. Steven Horsford, NV-04
Hon. Jahana Hayes, CT-05
Hon. Lucy McBath, GA-06
Hon. Joe Neguse, CO-02
Hon. Ilhan Omar, MN-05
Hon. Ayanna Pressley, MA-07
Hon. Lauren Underwood, IL-14
Hon. Marilyn Strickland, WA-10
Hon. Ritchie Torres, NY-15
Hon. Nikema Williams, GA-05
Hon. Raphael Warnock, State of Georgia
Hon. Troy Carter, Sr. LA-02
Hon. Shontel Brown, OH-11
Hon. Shelia Cherfilus-McCormick, FL-20
Hon. Cleo Fields, LA-06
Hon. Jasmine Crockett, TX-30
Hon. Don Davis, NC-01
Hon. Valerie Foushee, NC-04
Hon. Maxwell Alejandro Frost, FL-10
Hon. Glenn Ivey, MD-04
Hon. Jonathan Jackson, IL-01
Hon. Sydney Kamlager-Dove, CA-37
Hon. Summer Lee, PA-12
Hon. Emilia Sykes, OH-13
Hon. Jennifer McClellan, VA-04
Hon. Gabe Amo, RI-01
Hon. Lamonica McIver, NJ-10
Hon. Angela Alsobrooks, State of Maryland
Hon. Wesley Bell, MO-1
Hon. Janelle Bynum, OR-05
Hon. Herb Conaway, M.D., NJ-03
Hon. Shomari C. Figures, AL-02
Hon. Lateefah Simon, CA-12
Hon. Sylvester Turner, TX-18



April 8, 2025

Dear Senators Schumer, Thune, Klobuchar, and Boozman

We write as members of the Congressional Black Caucus serving on the House Agriculture Committee to express our deep concerns regarding the nomination of Stephen Vaden to the position of Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Vaden's tenure as general counsel at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) during the first Trump Administration raises serious questions about his fitness for this role.

The Deputy Secretary of Agriculture plays a critical role in shaping and implementing policies that directly impact Black farmers and producers, rural communities, and food security initiatives that affect underserved populations. Given these responsibilities, it is imperative that any nominee demonstrate a strong commitment to equity and fairness to all of the people served by the USDA. Mr. Vaden's record, however, reflects a pattern of undermining civil rights protections, disregarding equity in agricultural programs, and failing to uphold the fair treatment of Black farmers, producers, and ranchers.

During Mr. Vaden's tenure as USDA General Counsel during the first Trump Administration, he oversaw numerous efforts to roll back protections for Black farmers who faced systemic discrimination in accessing USDA programs.¹ Under his leadership, the Office of Civil Rights was significantly weakened, resulting in delayed and dismissed discrimination claims from Black and other minority farmers. Additionally, his legal approach consistently prioritized the agency's interests over historically disadvantaged farming communities, reinforcing barriers to equitable access to USDA programs and resources.²

Furthermore, Mr. Vaden facilitated harmful changes to federal nutrition policy, including not only more stringent work requirements,³ but also altering eligibility criteria.⁴

¹<https://www.npr.org/2023/02/19/1156851675/in-2022-black-farmers-were-persistently-left-behind-from-the-usdas-loan-system>

²<https://www.congress.gov/event/117th-congress/house-event/114408/text>

³<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/12/04/trump-administration-tightens-work-requirements-snap-which-could-cut-hundreds-thousands-food-stamps/>

⁴<https://www.cato.org/briefing-paper/snap-high-costs-low-nutrition>

2355 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING , WASHINGTON, DC 20515

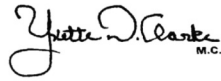
CBC.HOUSE.GOV

These moves would have kicked thousands of people off the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). With 21 percent of Black households experiencing food insecurity,⁵ these policy changes to SNAP would have disproportionately impacted Black communities.

Mr. Vaden's actions are in direct conflict with efforts to rectify longstanding disparities within federal agricultural and nutrition policy. Given these pressing concerns, we urge you to consider these factors as you consider Mr. Vaden's nomination.

We stand ready to engage in further dialogue and to work collaboratively to ensure that the leadership at the USDA is not only qualified but also committed to fostering a more fair and just agricultural system for all Americans.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working together to uphold the values of fairness and justice in federal agricultural policy.



U.S. Representative Yvette D. Clarke (NY-09)
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus



U.S. Representative Shontel M. Brown (OH-11)
Vice Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture



U.S. Representative David Scott (GA-13)



U.S. Representative Shomari Figures (AL-02)



U.S. Representative Alma Adams (NC-12)



U.S. Representative Jahana Hayes (CT-05)

⁵ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=108925>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan L. Jackson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jonathan" and last name "Jackson" clearly legible, and a middle initial "L." in between.

U.S. Representative Jonathan Jackson (IL-01)

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, & FORESTRY
Questions for Executive Nominees
119th Congress: Part I

1. Basic Biographical Information

Please provide the following information.

<i>Position to Which You Have Been Nominated</i>	
<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date of Nomination</u>
Deputy Secretary of Department of Agriculture	January 20, 2025

<i>Current Legal Name</i>			
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>
Stephen	Alexander	Vaden	

<i>Addresses</i>					
<u>Residential Address</u> (do not include street address)			<u>Office Address</u> (include street address)		
			Street: 1 Federal Plaza		
City: Union City	State: TN	Zip: 38261	City: New York	State: NY	Zip: 10278

<i>Other Names Used</i>						
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<small>Check if Maiden Name</small>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)
N/A					Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>
					Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Birth Year and Place</i>	
Year of Birth (Do not include month and day.)	Place of Birth
1982	Memphis, TN

<i>Marital Status</i>					
Check All That Describe Your Current Situation:					
Never Married	Married	Separated	Annulled	Divorced	Widowed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Spouse's Name (current spouse only)</i>			
<u>Spouse's First Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Middle Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Last Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Suffix</u>
N/A			

<i>Spouse's Other Names Used (current spouse only)</i>						
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<small>Check if Maiden Name</small>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)
N/A					Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>
					Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Children's Names (if over 18)</i>			
First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Suffix
N/A			

2. Education

List all post-secondary schools attended.

<u>Name of School</u>	<u>Type of School</u> (vocational/technical/trade school, college/university/military college, correspondence/distance/extension/online school)	<u>Date Began School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Ended School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still in school)	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Date Awarded</u>
Vanderbilt University	University	8/2000 <small>Est</small> <input type="checkbox"/>	5/2004 <small>Est Present</small> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	B.A.	5/14/04
Yale Law School	Professional School	8/2005 <small>Est</small> <input type="checkbox"/>	6/2008 <small>Est Present</small> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	J.D.	6/4/08
		<small>Est</small> <input type="checkbox"/>	<small>Est Present</small> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		
		<small>Est</small> <input type="checkbox"/>	<small>Est Present</small> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		

3. Employment

(A) In reverse chronological order, list all of your employment activities, including unemployment and self-employment. If the employment activity was military duty, list separate employment activity periods to show each change of military duty station. Do not list employment before your 18th birthday unless to provide a minimum of two years of employment history.

<u>Type of Employment</u> (Active Military Duty Station, National Guard/Reserve, USPS Commissioned Corps, Other Federal employment, State Government (Non-Federal Employment), Self-employment, Unemployment, Federal Contractor, Non-Government Employment (excluding self-employment), Other)	<u>Name of Your Employer/Assigned Duty Station</u>	<u>Most Recent Position Title/Rank</u>	<u>Location</u> (City and State only)	<u>Date Employment Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Employment Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still employed)
Other Federal Employment	U.S. Court of International Trade	Judge	New York, NY	12/20 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other Federal Employment	U.S. Department of Agriculture	General Counsel	Washington, DC	1/17 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> 12/20
Non-Government Employment	Jones Day	Associate	Washington, DC	8/14 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> 1/17
Non-Government Employment	Patton Boggs	Associate	Washington, DC	1/11 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> 8/14
Other Federal Employment	Hon. Samuel H. Mays, Jr. (W.D. Tenn)	Law Clerk	Memphis, TN	9/09 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> 12/10
Other Federal Employment	Hon. Julia Smith Gibbons (6 th Cir.)	Law Clerk	Memphis, TN	9/08	9/09
Non-Government Employment	Dean Harold H. Koh	Teaching Assistant	New Haven, CT	9/07	1/08
Non-Government Employment	Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis	Summer Associate	Nashville, TN	7/07	8/07
Non-Government Employment	Patton Boggs	Summer Associate	Washington, DC	5/07	7/07
State Government	Tennessee Supreme Court	Intern	Nashville, TN	5/06	8/06
Non-Government Employment	John Marshall Vaden	Property Manager	Union City, TN	6/04	8/05

(B) List any advisory, consultative, honorary or other part-time service or positions with federal, state, or local governments, not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Government Entity</u>	<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date Service Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Service Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still serving)
N/A		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>

(C) List all positions held as an officer, director, trustee, partner, proprietor, agent, representative, or consultant of any corporation, company, firm, partnership, or other for profit or nonprofit organization that is not otherwise listed in response to question 3(A).

<u>Name of Entity</u>	<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date Service Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Service Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still serving)
First Baptist Church	Finance Committee Member	10/23 Est <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
First Baptist Church	Investment Committee Members	8/24 Est <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Federalist Society	Administrative Law Practice Group Executive Committee Member	3/15 Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

(D) Please submit a copy of your resume with this questionnaire.

4. Honors and Awards

List all scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, civilian service citations, military medals, academic or professional honors, honorary society memberships and any other special recognition for outstanding service or achievement.

Phi Beta Kappa
 Phi Alpha Theta (history honorary society)
 Vanderbilt Fellow to the Center for the Study of the Presidency
 Discovery Park of America Discovery Award
 Brigham Young University Law School Jurist-in-Residence Spring 2022

5. Memberships

List all memberships that you have held in professional, social, business, fraternal, scholarly, civic, or charitable organizations in the last 10 years.

Unless relevant to your nomination, you do NOT need to include memberships in charitable organizations available to the public as a result of a tax deductible donation of \$1,000 or less, parent-teacher associations or other organizations connected to schools attended by your children, athletic clubs or teams, automobile support organizations (such as AAA), discounts clubs (such as Groupon or Sam's Club), or affinity memberships/consumer clubs (such as frequent flyer memberships).

<u>Name of Organization</u>	<u>Dates of Your Membership</u> (You may approximate.)	<u>Position(s) Held</u>
First Baptist Church	October 2016-Present	Member, Finance Committee, Investment Committee
Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies	August 2006-Present	Member, Administrative Law Practice Group Executive Committee
Teneo	August 2008-Present	Member
Obion County Chamber of Commerce	June 2019-Present	Member
Union City Rotary Club	April 2021-Present	Member

6. Political Activity

(A) Have you ever been a candidate for or been elected or appointed to a political office?

☐ Yes ☒ No (If yes, please complete the chart below)

<u>Name of Office</u>	<u>Elected/Appointed/ Candidate Only</u>	<u>Year(s) Election Held or Appointment Made</u>	<u>Term of Service (if applicable)</u>

(B) List any offices held in or services rendered, including volunteer services, to a political party or election committee during the last 10 years that you have not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Party/Election Committee</u>	<u>Office/Services Rendered</u>	<u>Responsibilities</u>	<u>Dates of Service</u>
None			

(C) Itemize all individual political contributions of \$200 or more that you have made in the past five years to any individual, campaign organization, political party, political action committee, or similar entity. Please list each individual contribution and not the total amount contributed to the person or entity during the year.

<u>Name of Recipient</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Year of Contribution</u>
None		

7. Publications and Speeches

(A) List the titles, publishers and dates of books, articles, reports or other published materials that you have written, including articles published on the Internet. Include a link to each publication when possible. If a link is not available, provide a digital copy of the publication via email if available. Please list all required publications even if no copy of the publication is available to provide.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Date(s) of Publication</u>
<i>Chevron Deference in the Circuit Courts</i>	Federalist Society	August 17, 2016
<i>Perez v. Mortgage Bankers Association: Portending a Return to Judicial Engagement</i>	Federalist Society	October 2015
<i>Tennessee Trial Court Strikes Down State's Tort Reform Act</i>	Federalist Society	June 1, 2015
<i>Pre-9/11 Politicians in a Post-9/11 World</i>	Intelligence and National Security: The Secret World of Spies	2015
<i>More Judicial Accountability Is Welcome</i>	<i>Commercial Appeal</i>	July 5, 2013
<i>Bad Guy in Real Life Potboiler is Not Election of Judges</i>	<i>The Tennessean</i>	August 24, 2008
<i>Ghosts from the Past: Richard Nixon, the 1970 Cambodian Incursion, and a Re-Evaluation of His "Plan" to End the Vietnam War</i>	Vanderbilt University	April 16, 2004

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(B) List any formal speeches or presentations you have delivered during the last 10 years relevant to the position to which you have been nominated, and all speeches/presentations you have delivered related to any topic for the last five years. Include any testimony to Congress or any other legislative or administrative body. Include a link to each speech when possible. If a link is not available, provide a digital copy of the publication via email if available. Please list all known required speeches even if no copy is available to provide.

<u>Title/Topic</u>	<u>Place/Audience</u>	<u>Date(s) of Speech</u>
See attached list		

8. Lobbying

In the past 10 years, have you registered as a lobbyist? If so, please indicate the state, federal, or local bodies with which you have registered (e.g., House, Senate, California Secretary of State).

I have never registered as a lobbyist

9. Digital Platforms

Please list all digital platforms (including social media and other digital content sites) on which you currently operate, or have formerly operated, an account, regardless of whether the account was held in your name or an alias. Include the full “alias” or “handle”, including a link to each account if possible. Indicate whether the account is active, deleted, or dormant.

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/stephen-vaden-9799508b/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/stephen.vaden>

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF
GOVERNMENT ETHICS



April 24, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, I enclose a copy of the financial disclosure report filed by Stephen Alexander Vaden, who has been nominated by President Trump for the position of Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture.

We have reviewed the report and have obtained advice from the agency concerning any possible conflict in light of its functions and the nominee's proposed duties. Also enclosed is an ethics agreement outlining the actions that the nominee will undertake to avoid conflicts of interest. Unless a date for compliance is indicated in the ethics agreement, the nominee must fully comply within three months of confirmation with any action specified in the ethics agreement.

Based thereon, we believe that this nominee is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest.

Sincerely,

SETH JAFFE

Digitally signed by SETH JAFFE
Date: 2025.03.21 17:12:21
+04'00'

Seth Jaffe
Chief, Ethics Law and Policy Branch

Enclosures



March 20, 2025

Mr. Stuart Bender
Designated Agency Ethics Official
U.S. Department of Agriculture
J.L. Whitten Building
Room 347-W
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Bender:

The purpose of this letter is to describe the steps that I will take to avoid any actual or apparent conflict of interest in the event that I am confirmed for the position of Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is my responsibility to understand and comply with commitments outlined in this agreement.

SECTION 1 – GENERAL COMMITMENTS

As required by the criminal conflicts of interest law at 18 U.S.C. § 208(a), I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter in which I know that I have a financial interest directly and predictably affected by the matter, or in which I know that a person whose interests are imputed to me has a financial interest directly and predictably affected by the particular matter, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2). I understand that the interests of the following persons are imputed to me:

- Any spouse or minor child of mine;
- Any general partner of a partnership in which I am a limited or general partner;
- Any organization in which I serve as an officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee, even if uncompensated; and
- Any person or organization with which I am negotiating or have an arrangement concerning prospective employment.

In the event that an actual or potential conflict of interest arises during my appointment, I will consult with an agency ethics official and take the measures necessary to resolve the conflict, such as recusal from the particular matter or divestiture of an asset.

If I have a managed account or otherwise use the services of an investment professional during my appointment, I will ensure that the account manager or investment professional obtains my prior approval on a case-by-case basis for the purchase of any assets other than cash, cash equivalents, investment funds that qualify for the regulatory exemption for diversified mutual funds and unit investment trusts at 5 C.F.R. § 2640.201(a), obligations of the United States, or municipal bonds.

I will receive a live ethics briefing from a member of the ethics office after my confirmation but not later than 15 days after my appointment pursuant to the ethics program regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2638.305. Within 90 days of my confirmation, I will submit my Certification of Ethics Agreement Compliance which documents my compliance with this ethics agreement.

I will not modify this ethics agreement without your approval and the approval of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE) pursuant to the ethics agreement requirements contained in the financial disclosure regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2634.803(a)(4).

SECTION 2 – FARMLAND PROPERTY

I own real property in Obion County, Tennessee, and Fulton County, Kentucky. These properties are leased out for farming on a fixed cash basis to a tenant on a fixed cash lease on the farm. I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that will have a direct and predictable effect on my financial interest in each of these properties unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2).

SECTION 3 – PUBLIC POSTING

I have been advised that this ethics agreement and the Certification of Ethics Agreement Compliance will be posted publicly, consistent with the public information law at 5 U.S.C. § 552, on the website of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics with ethics agreements of other presidential nominees who file public financial disclosure reports.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Stephen Alexander Vaden", written in a cursive style.

Hon. Stephen Alexander Vaden

Report Type: Nominee Report
Year (Annual Report only):
Date of Appointment:
Date of Termination:

Executive Branch Personnel
Public Financial Disclosure Report (OGE Form 278e)

Filer's Information

Vaden, Stephen Alexander
Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture

Other Federal Government Positions Held During the Preceding 12 Months:
Federal Judge on the United States Court of International Trade (12/2020 - Present)

Names of Congressional Committees Considering Nomination:
• Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Electronic Signature - I certify that the statements I have made in this form are true, complete and correct to the best of my knowledge.
/s/ Vaden, Stephen Alexander [electronically signed on 02/28/2025 by Vaden, Stephen Alexander in Integrity.gov]

Agency Ethics Official's Opinion - On the basis of information contained in this report, I conclude that the filer is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations (subject to any comments below).

/s/ Bender, Stuart, Certifying Official [electronically signed on 03/21/2025 by Bender, Stuart in Integrity.gov]

Other review conducted by

U.S. Office of Government Ethics Certification
/s/ Jaffe, Seth, Certifying Official [electronically signed on 03/21/2025 by Jaffe, Seth in Integrity.gov]

Comments of Reviewing Officials (public annotations):

PART	#	REFERENCE	COMMENT
N/A	N/A	General	(03/19/2025, Bender, Stuart): U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE) regulations require a \$200 late filing fee because the filer filed two days after the end of OGE's grace period. However, in accordance with OGE's regulations at 5 C.F.R. § 2634.704(b)(1), USDA's Designated Agency Ethics Official is waiving the late filing fee because the delay was due to circumstances outside of the filer's control.

1. Filer's Positions Held Outside United States Government

None

2. Filer's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	Roth IRA	See Endnote	No		
1.1	(MRFIX) MFS RESEARCH FUND CLASS A M/F	Yes	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.2	(AEPFX) EUROPACIFIC GROWTH FUND CLASS F2 - AMERICAN FUNDS N/L	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.3	Vanguard 500 Index Fund Admiral Shares (VFIAX)	Yes	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.4	Wasatch Small Cap Growth Fund Institutional Class Shares (WICVX)	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.5	EATON VANCE ATLANTA CAPITAL SMID CAP FUND CL I N/L	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.6	Cash (U.S. Investment Account)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2	IRA				
2.1	Cash (U.S. Investment Account)	N/A	None (or less than \$1,001)		None (or less than \$201)

3. Filer's Employment Agreements and Arrangements

None

4. Filer's Sources of Compensation Exceeding \$5,000 in a Year

None

5. Spouse's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

None

6. Other Assets and Income

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	Raymond James Ambassador Account #1	See Endnote			
1.1	ALLSTATE CORPORATION	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.2	ALPHABET INCORPORATED CAP STK CLASS A	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.3	AMAZON COM INCORPORATED	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.4	HOME DEPOT INCORPORATED	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
1.5	JPMORGAN CHASE & COMPANY	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
1.6	LAUDER ESTEE COMPANIES INCORPORATED CLASS A	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1.7	MICROSOFT CORPORATION	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Dividends Capital Gains	\$201 - \$1,000
1.8	NXP SEMICONDUCTORS N V	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.9	VISA INCORPORATED COM CLASS A	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.10	Cash (U.S. Investment Account)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.11	VANGUARD INDEX FUNDS S&P 500 ETF SHS NEW	Yes	\$100,001 - \$250,000		\$1,001 - \$2,500
1.12	IQVIA Holdings (IQV)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.13	UnitedHealth Group, Inc. (UNH)	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
1.14	L3Harris Technologies, Inc. (LHX)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
1.15	Trane Technologies (TT)	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
1.16	The TJX Cos., Inc. (TJX)	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.17	Edwards Lifesciences Corp. (EW)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.18	ADVANCED MICRO DEVICES INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.19	CADENCE DESIGN SYSTEM INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.20	CHIPOTLE MEXICAN GRILL INCORPORATED	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.21	DEXCOM INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1.22	DIAMONDBACK ENERGY INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
1.23	FISERV INCORPORATED	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.24	META PLATFORMS INCORPORATED CLASS A	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.25	S&P GLOBAL INCORPORATED	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.26	SALESFORCE INCORPORATED	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.27	STERIS PLC SHS USD (IRELAND)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.28	SYNOPSYS INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.29	Amphenol Corporation (APH)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2	Raymond James Ambassador Account #2	No			
2.1	Cash (U.S. Investment Account)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2.2	Vanguard 500 Index Fund (VFIAX)	Yes	\$250,001 - \$500,000		\$2,501 - \$5,000
2.3	BLACKROCK MULTI ASSET INCOME PORTFOLIO FUND INST CLASS (BIICX)	Yes	\$100,001 - \$250,000		\$5,001 - \$15,000
2.4	FEDERATED HERMES STRATEGIC VALUE DIV FD INSTL SHRS IS NIL	Yes	\$15,001 - \$50,000		\$201 - \$1,000
2.5	VANGUARD INDEX FUNDS S&P 500 ETF SHS NEW	Yes	\$100,001 - \$250,000		\$1,001 - \$2,500
3	Bank3. (Community bank)	See Endnote	\$50,001 - \$100,000		None (or less than \$201)

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
4	Residential Real Estate 1, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
5	Residential Real Estate 2, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
6	Residential Real Estate 3, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
7	Residential Real Estate 4, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
8	Residential Real Estate 5, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
9	Residential Real Estate 6, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
10	Residential Real Estate 7, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
11	Residential Real Estate 8, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
12	Residential Real Estate 9, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
13	Residential Real Estate 10, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
14	Residential Real Estate 11, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
15	Residential Real Estate 12, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
16	Residential Real Estate 13, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)
17	Residential Real Estate 14, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	None (or less than \$201)

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
18	Residential Real Estate 15, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	Rent or Royalties	\$2,501 - \$5,000
19	Residential Real Estate 16, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	Rent or Royalties	\$5,001 - \$15,000
20	Residential Real Estate 17, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	Rent or Royalties	\$5,001 - \$15,000
21	Residential Real Estate 18, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	Rent or Royalties	None (or less than \$201)
22	Residential Real Estate 19, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	Rent or Royalties	\$2,501 - \$5,000
23	Residential Lot 1, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A		None (or less than \$201)
24	Residential Lot 2, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A		None (or less than \$201)
25	Residential Lot 3, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A		None (or less than \$201)
26	Residential Lot 4, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A		None (or less than \$201)
27	Residential Real Estate 20, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	Rent or Royalties	None (or less than \$201)
28	Commercial Real Estate 1, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A		None (or less than \$201)
29	Farm Land 1, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	Rent or Royalties	\$5,001 - \$15,000
30	Farm Land 2, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	N/A	Rent or Royalties	\$15,001 - \$50,000
31	Farm Land 3, Fulton County, KY	See Endnote	N/A	Rent or Royalties	\$15,001 - \$50,000

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
32	U.S. bank #1 Account (cash) #1	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
33	U.S. bank #1 Account (cash) #2	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Interest	\$1,001 - \$2,500
34	U.S. bank #1 Account (cash) #3	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
35	U.S. bank #2 Account (cash)	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Interest	\$2,501 - \$5,000
36	U.S. bank #2 Account (CD#1)	N/A	\$100,001 - \$250,000	Interest	\$5,001 - \$15,000
37	Raymond James Holding Account #1				
37.1	NORTH TX TWY AUTH REV, FIRST TIER REF REV BDS, INT AT MATY SER 2008D ASSURED GUARANTY CORP FORMERLY ACE GTY	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	None (or less than \$201)
37.2	METROPOLITAN WA D C ARPTS AUTH DULLES TOLL RD REV, REV BDS, DULES METRO RAIL AND CAPITAL, INT AT MATY SER 2009B ASSURED GUARANTY CORP FORMERLY ACE GTY	See Endnote N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
37.3	INTERCONTINENTAL EXCHANGE INCORPORATED	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
37.4	VANGUARD INDEX FUNDS S&P 500 ETF SHS NEW	Yes	\$50,001 - \$100,000		\$1,001 - \$2,500
38	Residential Lot 5, Obion County, TN	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
39	US bank #3 Account (Cash)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
40	Raymond James Holding #2	No			
40.1	JOHNSON & JOHNSON	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
40.2	Procter & Gamble	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Dividends	\$1,001 - \$2,500
40.3	INTERCONTINENTAL EXCHANGE INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
40.4	EPHRATA NB FDIC # 7493 CERTIFICATE OF DEPOSIT MONTHLY CALLABLE BEGINNING 02/28/25 5.1% DUE 07/30/2029	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Interest	\$2,501 - \$5,000
40.5	HARRIS CNTY TX CULTURAL ED FACS FIN CORP REV REV BDS, THE METHODIST HOSP D/B/A HOUSTON METHODIST HOSP, SER 2015 4% DUE 12/01/2045 CALLABLE 06/01/2025 @ 100	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
40.6	VANGUARD INDEX FUNDS S&P 500 ETF SHS NEW	Yes	\$15,001 - \$50,000		\$201 - \$1,000
40.7	VANGUARD S&P 500 INDEX FUND ADMIRAL SHARES	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
40.8	Cash (U.S. Investment Account)	N/A	None (or less than \$1,001)		None (or less than \$201)
41	US bank #3 Account (CD)	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Interest	\$2,501 - \$5,000
42	Raymond James Ambassador Account #3				
42.1	ADVANCED MICRO DEVICES INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.2	ALLSTATE CORPORATION	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
42.3	ALPHABET INCORPORATED CAP STK CLASS A	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.4	CADENCE DESIGN SYSTEM INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.5	CHIPOTLE MEXICAN GRILL INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
42.6	DEXCOM INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.7	EDWARDS LIFESCIENCES CORPORATION	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.8	FISERV INCORPORATED	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.9	HOME DEPOT INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
42.10	QVIA HLDGS INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.11	JPMORGAN CHASE & COMPANY.	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.12	L3HARRIS TECHNOLOGIES INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
42.13	LAUDER ESTEE COMPANIES INCORPORATED CLASS A	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.14	META PLATFORMS INCORPORATED CLASS A	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.15	MICROSOFT CORPORATION	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.16	NXP SEMICONDUCTORS N V (NETHERLANDS)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000
42.17	S&P GLOBAL INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.18	SALESFORCE INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.19	TJX COMPANIES INCORPORATED NEW	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
42.20	TRANE TECHNOLOGIES PLC SHS (IRELAND)	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Dividends	\$201 - \$1,000

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#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
42.21	UNITEDHEALTH GROUP INCORPORATED	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	None (or less than \$201)
42.22	VISA INCORPORATED COM CLASS A	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Interest	None (or less than \$201)
42.23	Cash (U.S. Investment Account)	N/A	None (or less than \$1,001)	Interest	None (or less than \$201)
42.24	Amphenol Corporation (APH)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	None (or less than \$201)
43	Loan to a Personal Friend (Mr. Yates)	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Interest	\$2,501 - \$5,000
44	13-week Treasury Bills	N/A	\$250,001 - \$500,000	Interest	\$2,501 - \$5,000
45	13-week Treasury Bills	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Interest	\$1,001 - \$2,500
46	Series I Savings Bonds	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	\$201 - \$1,000
47	U.S. bank #4 Account (CD #1)	N/A	\$50,001 - \$100,000	Interest	\$2,501 - \$5,000
48	U.S. bank #4 Account (CD#2)	N/A	\$100,001 - \$250,000	Interest	\$5,001 - \$15,000
49	U.S. bank #2 Account (CD#2)	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000	Interest	\$1,001 - \$2,500
50	Commercial Property 2, Obion County, TN	See Endnote	\$1,001 - \$15,000	Interest	None (or less than \$201)

7. Transactions

(N/A) - Not required for this type of report

8. Liabilities

None

9. Gifts and Travel Reimbursements

(N/A) - Not required for this type of report

Endnotes

PART	#	ENDNOTE
2.	1	Individual IRA.
6.	1	Guided Model Core Growth Equity Portfolio.
6.	3	Bank3 is a community bank headquartered in Memphis, TN.
6.	4	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	5	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	6	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	7	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	8	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	9	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	10	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	11	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.

PART	#	ENDNOTE
6.	12	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	13	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	14	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	15	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
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6.	28	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	29	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	30	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	31	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.
6.	37.2	Zero Coupon Municipal Bond.
6.	50	This represents 50% ownership in the property, with sibling owning other 50% of the property.

Summary of Contents

1. Filer's Positions Held Outside United States Government

Part 1 discloses positions that the filer held at any time during the reporting period (excluding positions with the United States Government). Positions are reportable even if the filer did not receive compensation.

This section does not include the following: (1) positions with religious, social, fraternal, or political organizations; (2) positions solely of an honorary nature; (3) positions held as part of the filer's official duties with the United States Government; (4) mere membership in an organization; and (5) passive investment interests as a limited partner or non-managing member of a limited liability company.

2. Filer's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

Part 2 discloses the following:

- Sources of earned and other non-investment income of the filer totaling more than \$200 during the reporting period (e.g., salary, fees, partnership share, honoraria, scholarships, and prizes)
- Assets related to the filer's business, employment, or other income-generating activities (1) that ended the reporting period with a value greater than \$1,000 or (2) from which more than \$200 in income was received during the reporting period (e.g., equity in business or partnership, stock options, retirement plans/accounts and their underlying holdings as appropriate, deferred compensation, and intellectual property, such as book deals and patents)

This section does not include assets or income from United States Government employment or assets that were acquired separately from the filer's business, employment, or other income-generating activities (e.g., assets purchased through a brokerage account). Note: The type of income is not required if the amount of income is \$0 - \$200 or if the asset qualifies as an excepted investment fund (EIF).

3. Filer's Employment Agreements and Arrangements

Part 3 discloses agreements or arrangements that the filer had during the reporting period with an employer or former employer (except the United States Government), such as the following:

- Future employment
- Leave of absence
- Continuing payments from an employer, including severance and payments not yet received for previous work (excluding ordinary salary from a current employer)
- Continuing participation in an employee welfare, retirement, or other benefit plan, such as pensions or a deferred compensation plan
- Retention or disposition of employer-awarded equity, sharing in profits or earned interests (e.g., vested and unvested stock options, restricted stock, future share of a company's profits, etc.)

4. Filer's Sources of Compensation Exceeding \$5,000 in a Year

Part 4 discloses sources (except the United States Government) that paid more than \$5,000 in a calendar year for the filer's services during any year of the reporting period.

The filer discloses payments both from employers and from any clients to whom the filer personally provided services. The filer discloses a source even if the source made its payment to the filer's employer and not to the filer. The filer does not disclose a client's payment to the filer's employer if the filer did not provide the services for which the client is paying.

5. Spouse's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

Part 5 discloses the following:

- Sources of earned income (excluding honoraria) for the filer's spouse totaling more than \$1,000 during the reporting period (e.g., salary, consulting fees, and partnership share)
- Sources of honoraria for the filer's spouse greater than \$200 during the reporting period
- Assets related to the filer's spouse's employment, business activities, other income-generating activities (1) that ended the reporting period with a value greater than \$1,000 or (2) from which more than \$200 in income was received during the reporting period (e.g., equity in business or partnership, stock options, retirement plans/accounts and their underlying holdings as appropriate, deferred compensation, and intellectual property, such as book deals and patents)

This section does not include assets or income from United States Government employment or assets that were acquired separately from the filer's spouse's business employment, or other income-generating activities (e.g., assets purchased through a brokerage account). Note: The type of income is not required if the amount of income is \$0 - \$200 or if the asset qualifies as an excepted investment fund (EIF). Amounts of income are not required for a spouse's earned income (excluding honoraria).

6. Other Assets and Income

Part 6 discloses each asset, not already reported, (1) that ended the reporting period with a value greater than \$1,000 or (2) from which more than \$200 in investment income was received during the reporting period. For purposes of the value and income thresholds, the filer aggregates the filer's interests with those of the filer's spouse and dependent children.

This section does not include the following types of assets: (1) a personal residence (unless it was rented out during the reporting period); (2) income or retirement benefits associated with United States Government employment (e.g., Thrift Savings Plan); and (3) cash accounts (e.g., checking, savings, money market accounts) at a single financial institution with a value of \$5,000 or less (unless more than \$200 in income was received). Additional exceptions apply. Note: The type of income is not required if the amount of income is \$0 - \$200 or if the asset qualifies as an excepted investment fund (EIF).

7. Transactions

Part 7 discloses purchases, sales, or exchanges of real property or securities in excess of \$1,000 made on behalf of the filer, the filer's spouse or dependent child during the reporting period.

This section does not include transactions that concern the following: (1) a personal residence, unless rented out; (2) cash accounts (e.g., checking, savings, CDs, money market accounts) and money market mutual funds; (3) Treasury bills, bonds, and notes; and (4) holdings within a federal Thrift Savings Plan account. Additional exceptions apply.

8. Liabilities

Part 8 discloses liabilities over \$10,000 that the filer, the filer's spouse or dependent child owed at any time during the reporting period.

This section does not include the following types of liabilities: (1) mortgages on a personal residence, unless rented out (note: certain PAS nominees and appointees are required to report all mortgages); (2) loans secured by a personal motor vehicle, household furniture, or appliances, unless the loan exceeds the item's purchase price; and (3) revolving charge accounts, such as credit card balances, if the outstanding liability did not exceed \$10,000 at the end of the reporting period. Additional exceptions apply.

9. Gifts and Travel Reimbursements

This section discloses:

- Gifts totaling more than \$480 that the filer, the filer's spouse, and dependent children received from any one source during the reporting period.
- Travel reimbursements totaling more than \$480 that the filer, the filer's spouse, and dependent children received from any one source during the reporting period.

For purposes of this section, the filer need not aggregate any gift or travel reimbursement with a value of \$192 or less. Regardless of the value, this section does not include the following items: (1) anything received from relatives; (2) anything received from the United States Government or from the District of Columbia, state, or local governments; (3) bequests and other forms of inheritance; (4) gifts and travel reimbursements given to the filer's agency in connection with the filer's official travel; (5) gifts of hospitality (food, lodging, entertainment) at the donor's residence or personal premises; and (6) anything received by the filer's spouse or dependent children totally independent of their relationship to the filer. Additional exceptions apply.

Privacy Act Statement

5 U.S.C. § 13101 et seq., and 5 C.F.R. Part 2634 of the U. S. Office of Government Ethics regulations require the reporting of this information. Failure to provide the requested information may result in separation, disciplinary action, or civil action. The primary use of the information on this report is for review by Government officials to determine compliance with applicable Federal laws and regulations. This report may also be disclosed upon request to any requesting person in accordance with 5 U.S.C. §§ 13107 and 13122(b)(1) or as otherwise authorized by law. You may inspect applications for public access of your own form upon request. Additional disclosures of the information on this report may be made: (1) to any requesting person, subject to the limitation contained in section 208(c)(1) of title 18; any determination granting an exemption pursuant to sections 208(b)(1) and 208(b)(3) of title 18; (2) to a Federal, State, or local law enforcement agency if the disclosing agency becomes aware of violations or potential violations of law or regulation; (3) to a source when necessary to obtain information relevant to a conflict of interest investigation or determination; (4) to the National Archives and Records Administration or the General Services Administration in records management inspections; (5) to the Office of Management and Budget during legislative coordination on private relief legislation; (6) when the disclosing agency determines that the records are arguably relevant to a proceeding before a court, grand jury, or administrative or adjudicative body, or in a proceeding before an administrative or adjudicative body when the adjudicator determines the records to be relevant to the proceeding; (7) to reviewing officials in a new office, department or agency when an employee transfers or is detailed from one covered position to another; a public financial disclosure report and any accompanying documents, including statements notifying an employee's supervising ethics office of the commencement of negotiations for future employment or compensation or of an agreement for future employment or compensation; (8) to a Member of Congress or a congressional office in response to an inquiry made on behalf of and at the request of an individual who is the subject of the record; (9) to contractors and other non-Government employees working on a contract, service or assignment for the Federal Government when necessary to accomplish a function related to this system of records; (10) on the OGE Website and to any person, department or agency, any written ethics agreement, including certifications of ethics agreement compliance, filed with OGE by an individual nominated by the President to a position requiring Senate confirmation; (11) on the OGE Website and to any person, department or agency, any certificate of divestiture issued by OGE; (12) on the OGE Website and to any person, department or agency, any waiver of the restrictions contained in Executive Order 13889 or any superseding executive order; (13) to appropriate agencies, entities and persons when there has been a suspected or confirmed breach of the system of records, the agency maintaining the records has determined that there is a risk of harm to individuals, the agency, the Federal Government, or national security, and the disclosure is reasonably necessary to assist in connection with the agency's efforts to respond to the suspected or confirmed breach or to prevent, minimize, or remedy such harm; and (14) to another Federal agency or Federal entity, when the agency maintaining the record determines that information from this system of records is reasonably necessary to assist the recipient agency or entity in responding to a suspected or confirmed breach or in preventing, minimizing, or remedying the risk of harm to individuals, the recipient agency or entity, the Federal Government, or national security. See also the OGE/GOVT-1 executive branch-wide Privacy Act system of records.

Public Burden Information

This collection of information is estimated to take an average of ten hours per response, including time for reviewing the instructions, gathering the data needed, and completing the form. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the Program Counsel, U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE) 250 E Street, S.W., Suite 750, Washington, DC 20024-3249.

Pursuant to the Paperwork Reduction Act, as amended, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and no person is required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB (that control number 3209-0001, is displayed here and at the top of the first page of this OGE Form 278e).

April 4, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman, Chairman Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar:

The Ethics in Government Act of 1978 (the Act), as amended, provides that Presidential nominees for a position requiring the advice and consent of the Senate shall provide any necessary updates to their public financial disclosure report with respect to any outside earned income and honoraria received through the period ending no more than five days prior to the commencement of the Senate hearing of their nomination. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 13103(b)(1) and 5 C.F.R. § 2634.606(a).

Please be advised that I have informed the appropriate ethics officials that the information required by section 102(a)(1)(A) of the Act with respect to income and honoraria contained in OGE Form 278e (Executive Branch Public Financial Disclosure Report) executed by me on February 28, 2025, is current as of April 4, 2025. This date is within five days prior to the date of the hearing scheduled to consider my nomination.

Sincerely,

/s/ Stephen Alexander Vaden

Stephen Alexander Vaden

cc: Stuart Bender, Designated Agency Ethics Official and Director, USDA Office of Ethics

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, & FORESTRY
Questions for Executive Nominees
119th Congress: Part I

1. Basic Biographical Information

Please provide the following information.

<i>Position to Which You Have Been Nominated</i>	
<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date of Nomination</u>
U.S. Department of Agriculture General Counsel	February 11, 2025

<i>Current Legal Name</i>			
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>
Tyler	Sherwood	Clarkson	

<i>Addresses</i>					
<u>Residential Address</u> (do not include street address)			<u>Office Address</u> (include street address)		
			Street: 27 Drydock Ave 8th Floor		
City: Arlington	State: VA	Zip: 22201	City: Boston	State: MA	Zip: 02210

<i>Other Names Used</i>						
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<small>Check if Maiden Name</small>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)
					Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>
					Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est <input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Birth Year and Place</i>	
Year of Birth (Do not include month and day.)	Place of Birth
1987	San Francisco, CA

<i>Marital Status</i>					
Check All That Describe Your Current Situation:					
Never Married	Married	Separated	Annulled	Divorced	Widowed
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Spouse's Name</i> (current spouse only)			
<u>Spouse's First Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Middle Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Last Name</u>	<u>Spouse's Suffix</u>
Kristin	Richmond	Clarkson	

<i>Spouse's Other Names Used</i> (current spouse only)						
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<small>Check if Maiden Name</small>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)
Kristin	Lee	Richmond		X	1988 <small>Est</small> <input type="checkbox"/>	2020 <small>Est</small> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
					<small>Est</small> <input type="checkbox"/>	<small>Est</small> <input type="checkbox"/>

<i>Children's Names (if over 18)</i>			
First Name	Middle Name	Last Name	Suffix

2. Education

List all post-secondary schools attended.

<u>Name of School</u>	<u>Type of School</u> (vocational/technical/trade school, college/university/military college, correspondence/distance/extension/online school)	<u>Date Began School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Ended School</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still in school)	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Date Awarded</u>
UVA	University	Est August 2006 <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present May 2010 <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	BA	May 23, 2010
UVA Law	Law School	Est August 2010 <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present May 2013 <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	JD	May 19, 2013
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		

3. Employment

(A) In reverse chronological order, list all of your employment activities, including unemployment and self-employment. If the employment activity was military duty, list separate employment activity periods to show each change of military duty station. Do not list employment before your 18th birthday unless to provide a minimum of two years of employment history.

Type of Employment (Active Military Duty Station, National Guard/Reserve, USPS Commissioned Corps, Other Federal employment, State Government (Non-Federal Employment), Self-employment, Unemployment, Federal Contractor, Non-Government Employment (excluding self-employment), Other)	Name of Your Employer/Assigned Duty Station	Most Recent Position Title/Rank	Location (City and State only)	Date Employment Began (month/year) (check box if estimate)	Date Employment Ended (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still employed)
Non-Government Employment	Ginkgo Bioworks	VP Deputy GC (Previously Associate General Counsel)	Boston, MA	April 2021 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	<input type="checkbox"/> Est <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Present
Unemployment	N/A	N/A	Washington, DC	January 2021	April 2021
Federal Employment	USDA	Acting GC (Previously Deputy General Counsel and Principal Deputy General Counsel)	Washington, DC	March 2018 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	<input type="checkbox"/> Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present January 2021
Non-Government Employment	Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, US LLP	Associate (Previously Summer Associate – Summer 2012)	Washington, DC	October 2013 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	<input type="checkbox"/> Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present March 2018
Federal Clerkship/Internship	U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee (Cornyn)	Law Clerk	Washington, DC	May 2011 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	<input type="checkbox"/> Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present July 2011
Misc. Internships (college summers) including the U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee (Chairman Kyl), the U.S. Senate Steering Committee (Chairman DeMint), and the American Center for Law and Justice	Misc.	Intern	Washington, DC	N/A <input type="checkbox"/> Est	N/A <input type="checkbox"/> Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present

(B) List any advisory, consultative, honorary or other part-time service or positions with federal, state, or local governments, not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Government Entity</u>	<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date Service Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Service Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still serving)
N/A		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

(C) List all positions held as an officer, director, trustee, partner, proprietor, agent, representative, or consultant of any corporation, company, firm, partnership, or other for profit or nonprofit organization that is not otherwise listed in response to question 3(A).

<u>Name of Entity</u>	<u>Name of Position</u>	<u>Date Service Began</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate)	<u>Date Service Ended</u> (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still serving)
N/A		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
		Est <input type="checkbox"/>	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

(D) Please submit a copy of your resume with this questionnaire.

4. Honors and Awards

List all scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, civilian service citations, military medals, academic or professional honors, honorary society memberships and any other special recognition for outstanding service or achievement.

Received scholarship money from UVA Law with my offer of admission that covered a part of my legal education. Also was invited to join – and joined – the Raven Society at UVA; the Raven Society is the oldest honorary society at UVA.

5. Memberships

List all memberships that you have held in professional, social, business, fraternal, scholarly, civic, or charitable organizations in the last 10 years.

Unless relevant to your nomination, you do NOT need to include memberships in charitable organizations available to the public as a result of a tax deductible donation of \$1,000 or less, parent-teacher associations or other organizations connected to schools attended by your children, athletic clubs or teams, automobile support organizations (such as AAA), discounts clubs (such as Groupon or Sam's Club), or affinity memberships/consumer clubs (such as frequent flyer memberships).

<u>Name of Organization</u>	<u>Dates of Your Membership</u> (You may approximate.)	<u>Position(s) Held</u>
Federalist Society	2006 to 2019	Member
Teneo	2014 to Present	Member
DC Bar	2018 to Present	Member
NY Bar	2014 to Present	Member

6. Political Activity

(A) Have you ever been a candidate for or been elected or appointed to a political office?

☒ Yes ☐ No (If yes, please complete the chart below)

<u>Name of Office</u>	<u>Elected/Appointed/ Candidate Only</u>	<u>Year(s) Election Held or Appointment Made</u>	<u>Term of Service (if applicable)</u>
(See above re employment)			

(B) List any offices held in or services rendered, including volunteer services, to a political party or election committee during the last 10 years that you have not listed elsewhere.

<u>Name of Party/Election Committee</u>	<u>Office/Services Rendered</u>	<u>Responsibilities</u>	<u>Dates of Service</u>
Trump Vance Transition	Volunteered on USDA Transition	Helped with limited OGC transition activities.	November 2024 to January 2025.

(C) Itemize all individual political contributions of \$200 or more that you have made in the past five years to any individual, campaign organization, political party, political action committee, or similar entity. Please list each individual contribution and not the total amount contributed to the person or entity during the year.

<u>Name of Recipient</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Year of Contribution</u>
N/A		

7. Publications and Speeches

(A) List the titles, publishers and dates of books, articles, reports or other published materials that you have written, including articles published on the Internet. Include a link to each publication when possible. If a link is not available, provide a digital copy of the publication via email if available. Please list all required publications even if no copy of the publication is available to provide.

While in college I authored a small number (approximately a half-dozen) of brief editorials for the conservative periodical at the University of Virginia. I do not have copies of the editorials, and the editorials are not available online. Some of the editorials related to aspects of Supreme Court cases on the Detainee Treatment Act and the Military Commissions Act, the controversy surrounding John Bolton as the U.N. Ambassador, and a book review of Jack Goldsmith's *The Terror Presidency*.

<u>Title</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Date(s) of Publication</u>
(See above).		

(B) List any formal speeches or presentations you have delivered during the last 10 years relevant to the position to which you have been nominated, and all speeches/presentations you have delivered related to any topic for the last five years. Include any testimony to Congress or any other legislative or administrative body. Include a link to each speech when possible. If a link is not available, provide a digital copy of the publication via email if available. Please list all known required speeches even if no copy is available to provide.

<u>Title/Topic</u>	<u>Place/Audience</u>	<u>Date(s) of Speech</u>
Administrative Inquisitions? How Agencies Initiate, Conduct, and Conclude Investigations (Panel)	Federalist Society's National Lawyers Convention, Washington, DC	November 11, 2021
Restoring the Rule of Law: President Trump's Administrative Law Reforms	Federalist Society's Nashville Lawyers Chapter Event, Virtual Event	December 4, 2020

8. Lobbying

In the past 10 years, have you registered as a lobbyist? If so, please indicate the state, federal, or local bodies with which you have registered (e.g., House, Senate, California Secretary of State).

N/A

9. Digital Platforms

Please list all digital platforms (including social media and other digital content sites) on which you currently operate, or have formerly operated, an account, regardless of whether the account was held in your name or an alias. Include the full “alias” or “handle”, including a link to each account if possible. Indicate whether the account is active, deleted, or dormant.

LinkedIn: <https://x.com/tylerclarkson>

Twitter: <https://x.com/tylerclarkson>

Truth Social: <https://truthsocial.com/@tylerclarkson>

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF
GOVERNMENT ETHICS

April 24, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, I enclose a copy of the financial disclosure report filed by Tyler Clarkson, who has been nominated by President Trump for the position of General Counsel, Department of Agriculture.

We have reviewed the report and have obtained advice from the agency concerning any possible conflict in light of its functions and the nominee's proposed duties. Also enclosed is an ethics agreement outlining the actions that the nominee will undertake to avoid conflicts of interest. Unless a date for compliance is indicated in the ethics agreement, the nominee must fully comply within three months of confirmation with any action specified in the ethics agreement.

Based thereon, we believe that this nominee is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest.

Sincerely,

SETH JAFFE

Digitally signed by SETH JAFFE
Date: 2025.03.05 08:31:11
+05'00'

Seth Jaffe
Chief, Ethics Law and Policy Branch

Enclosures



March 3, 2025

Stuart Bender
Designated Agency Ethics Official
Department of Government Operations
1201 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Bender:

The purpose of this letter is to describe the steps that I will take to avoid any actual or apparent conflict of interest in the event that I am confirmed for the position of General Counsel, Department of Agriculture. It is my responsibility to understand and comply with commitments outlined in this agreement.

SECTION 1 – GENERAL COMMITMENTS

As required by the criminal conflicts of interest law at 18 U.S.C. § 208(a), I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter in which I know that I have a financial interest directly and predictably affected by the matter, or in which I know that a person whose interests are imputed to me has a financial interest directly and predictably affected by the particular matter, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2). I understand that the interests of the following persons are imputed to me:

- Any spouse or minor child of mine;
- Any general partner of a partnership in which I am a limited or general partner;
- Any organization in which I serve as an officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee, even if uncompensated; and
- Any person or organization with which I am negotiating or have an arrangement concerning prospective employment.

In the event that an actual or potential conflict of interest arises during my appointment, I will consult with an agency ethics official and take the measures necessary to resolve the conflict, such as recusal from the particular matter or divestiture of an asset.

If I have a managed account or otherwise use the services of an investment professional during my appointment, I will ensure that the account manager or investment professional obtains my prior approval on a case-by-case basis for the purchase of any assets other than cash, cash equivalents, investment funds that qualify for the regulatory exemption for diversified mutual funds and unit investment trusts at 5 C.F.R. § 2640.201(a), obligations of the United States, or municipal bonds.

I will receive a live ethics briefing from a member of the ethics office after my confirmation but not later than 15 days after my appointment pursuant to the ethics program regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2638.305. Within 90 days of my confirmation, I will submit my Certification of Ethics Agreement Compliance which documents my compliance with this ethics agreement.

I will not modify this ethics agreement without your approval and the approval of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE) pursuant to the ethics agreement requirements contained in the financial disclosure regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2634.803(a)(4).

SECTION 2 – EMPLOYMENT RELATED INTERESTS IN WHICH EQUITY IS HELD

Upon confirmation, I will resign from my position with Ginkgo Bioworks. I hold stock and unvested restricted stock units with Ginkgo Bioworks. I do not hold stock options, restricted stock, vested restricted stock units, or any other equity interest. As soon as practicable but not later than 90 days after my confirmation, I will divest my interests in Ginkgo Bioworks. Pursuant to company policy, I will forfeit my unvested RSUs in Ginkgo Bioworks at the time of resignation from the company. I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter that to my knowledge has a direct and predictable effect on the financial interests of this entity until I have divested it, unless I first obtain a written waiver, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(1), or qualify for a regulatory exemption, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 208(b)(2). I have verified that I will be able to carry out the divestitures within the timeframe described above. Pursuant to the impartiality regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502, for a period of one year after my resignation, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which I know Ginkgo Bioworks, is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

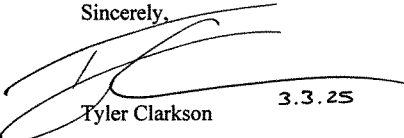
I understand that I may be eligible to request a Certificate of Divestiture for qualifying assets and that a Certificate of Divestiture is effective only if obtained prior to divestiture. Regardless of whether I receive a Certificate of Divestiture, I will ensure that all divestitures discussed in this agreement occur within the agreed upon timeframes and that all proceeds are invested in non-conflicting assets. I understand that I must timely submit my request for a Certificate of Divestiture to allow for adequate time for OGE to process the Certificate of Divestiture and in order to divest assets within the agreed upon timeframe.

I (including my spouse and minor children if applicable) will not repurchase any asset I was required to divest without consulting with my agency ethics official and the U.S. Office of Government Ethics.

SECTION 3 – PUBLIC POSTING

I have been advised that this ethics agreement and the Certification of Ethics Agreement Compliance will be posted publicly, consistent with the public information law at 5 U.S.C. § 552, on the website of the U.S. Office of Government Ethics with ethics agreements of other presidential nominees who file public financial disclosure reports.

Sincerely,



Tyler Clarkson

3.3.25

Report Type: Nominee Report
Year (Annual Report only):
Date of Appointment:
Date of Termination:

Executive Branch Personnel
Public Financial Disclosure Report (OGE Form 278e)

Filer's Information

Clarkson, Tyler
General Counsel, Department of Agriculture

Other Federal Government Positions Held During the Preceding 12 Months:
None

Names of Congressional Committees Considering Nomination:
• Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Electronic Signature - I certify that the statements I have made in this form are true, complete and correct to the best of my knowledge.

/s/ Clarkson, Tyler [electronically signed on 02/10/2025 by Clarkson, Tyler in Integrity.gov]

Agency Ethics Official's Opinion - On the basis of information contained in this report, I conclude that the filer is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations (subject to any comments below).

/s/ Bender, Stuart, Certifying Official [electronically signed on 03/02/2025 by Bender, Stuart in Integrity.gov]

Other review conducted by

U.S. Office of Government Ethics Certification

/s/ Jaffe, Seth, Certifying Official [electronically signed on 03/05/2025 by Jaffe, Seth in Integrity.gov]

1. Filer's Positions Held Outside United States Government

#	ORGANIZATION NAME	CITY, STATE	ORGANIZATION TYPE	POSITION HELD	FROM	TO
1	Ginkgo Bioworks	Boston, Massachusetts	Corporation	VP Deputy General Counsel	4/2021	Present

2. Filer's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	Ginkgo Bioworks 401(K)	No			
1.1	Vanguard 500 Index Admiral Fund	Yes	\$100,001 - \$250,000		None (or less than \$201)
1.2	Principal SmallCap S&P 600 Index Separate Account	Yes	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
2	Ginkgo Bioworks, unvested restricted stock units	N/A	\$100,001 - \$250,000		None (or less than \$201)
3	Ginkgo Bioworks	N/A		Salary	\$345,211
4	Ginkgo Bioworks Holdings Inc. Class A Common Stock (DNA)	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)

3. Filer's Employment Agreements and Arrangements

#	EMPLOYER OR PARTY	CITY, STATE	STATUS AND TERMS	DATE
1	Ginkgo Bioworks	Boston, Massachusetts	I will continue to participate in this defined contribution plan. The plan sponsor will not make further contributions after my separation.	4/2021

#	EMPLOYER OR PARTY	CITY, STATE	STATUS AND TERMS	DATE
2	Ginkgo Bloworks	Boston, Massachusetts	Pursuant to company policy, I will forfeit my unvested RSUs in Ginkgo Bloworks at the time of my resignation from the company.	4/2021

4. Filer's Sources of Compensation Exceeding \$5,000 in a Year

#	SOURCE NAME	CITY, STATE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DUTIES
1	Ginkgo Bloworks	Boston, Massachusetts	Services as VP Deputy General Counsel

5. Spouse's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

None

6. Other Assets and Income

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	U.S. bank #1 (cash account)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)
2	U.S. bank #2 (cash account)	N/A	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)

7. Transactions

(N/A) - Not required for this type of report

8. Liabilities

#	CREDITOR NAME		TYPE	AMOUNT	YEAR INCURRED	RATE	TERM
1	Nehnet	See Endnote	Student Loan	\$15,001 - \$50,000	2010	7.9%	Repayment plan dependent
2	Nehnet	See Endnote	Student Loan	\$15,001 - \$50,000	2011	7.9%	Repayment plan dependent
3	Nehnet	See Endnote	Student Loan	\$15,001 - \$50,000	2012	7.9%	Repayment plan dependent
4	Nehnet	See Endnote	Student Loan	\$10,001 - \$15,000	2012	6.8%	Repayment plan dependent

9. Gifts and Travel Reimbursements

(N/A) - Not required for this type of report

Endnotes

PART	#	ENDNOTE
1.	1	April 2021 to March 2023: Associate General Counsel March 2023 to Present: VP Deputy General Counsel
2.	2	These Restricted Stock Units (RSU) are unvested as of Feb. 10 and will be forfeited once I leave the company. The range indicated reflects the closing market price as of February 7, 2025 for all unvested RSUs as of Feb. 8, 2025.
2.	3	This salary amount is the total amount of compensation covering the period from January 1, 2024 through February 10, 2025.

PART	#	ENDNOTE
8.	1	Dept. of Education loan.
8.	2	Dept. of Education loan.
8.	3	Dept. of Education loan.
8.	4	Dept. of Education loan.

Summary of Contents

1. Filer's Positions Held Outside United States Government

Part 1 discloses positions that the filer held at any time during the reporting period (excluding positions with the United States Government). Positions are reportable even if the filer did not receive compensation.

This section does not include the following: (1) positions with religious, social, fraternal, or political organizations; (2) positions solely of an honorary nature; (3) positions held as part of the filer's official duties with the United States Government; (4) mere membership in an organization; and (5) passive investment interests as a limited partner or non-managing member of a limited liability company.

2. Filer's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

Part 2 discloses the following:

- Sources of earned and other non-investment income of the filer totaling more than \$200 during the reporting period (e.g., salary, fees, partnership share, honoraria, scholarships, and prizes)
- Assets related to the filer's business, employment, or other income-generating activities (1) that ended the reporting period with a value greater than \$1,000 or (2) from which more than \$200 in income was received during the reporting period (e.g., equity in business or partnership, stock options, retirement plans/accounts and their underlying holdings as appropriate, deferred compensation, and intellectual property, such as book deals and patents)

This section does not include assets or income from United States Government employment or assets that were acquired separately from the filer's business, employment, or other income-generating activities (e.g., assets purchased through a brokerage account). Note: The type of income is not required if the amount of income is \$0 - \$200 or if the asset qualifies as an excepted investment fund (EIF).

3. Filer's Employment Agreements and Arrangements

Part 3 discloses agreements or arrangements that the filer had during the reporting period with an employer or former employer (except the United States Government), such as the following:

- Future employment
- Leave of absence
- Continuing payments from an employer, including severance and payments not yet received for previous work (excluding ordinary salary from a current employer)
- Continuing participation in an employee welfare, retirement, or other benefit plan, such as pensions or a deferred compensation plan
- Retention or disposition of employer-awarded equity, sharing in profits or earned interests (e.g., vested and unvested stock options, restricted stock, future share of a company's profits, etc.)

4. Filer's Sources of Compensation Exceeding \$5,000 in a Year

Part 4 discloses sources (except the United States Government) that paid more than \$5,000 in a calendar year for the filer's services during any year of the reporting period.

The filer discloses payments both from employers and from any clients to whom the filer personally provided services. The filer discloses a source even if the source made its payment to the filer's employer and not to the filer. The filer does not disclose a client's payment to the filer's employer if the filer did not provide the services for which the client is paying.

5. Spouse's Employment Assets & Income and Retirement Accounts

Part 5 discloses the following:

- Sources of earned income (excluding honoraria) for the filer's spouse totaling more than \$1,000 during the reporting period (e.g., salary, consulting fees, and partnership share)
- Sources of honoraria for the filer's spouse greater than \$200 during the reporting period
- Assets related to the filer's spouse's employment, business activities, other income-generating activities (1) that ended the reporting period with a value greater than \$1,000 or (2) from which more than \$200 in income was received during the reporting period (e.g., equity in business or partnership, stock options, retirement plans/accounts and their underlying holdings as appropriate, deferred compensation, and intellectual property, such as book deals and patents)

This section does not include assets or income from United States Government employment or assets that were acquired separately from the filer's spouse's business employment, or other income-generating activities (e.g., assets purchased through a brokerage account). Note: The type of income is not required if the amount of income is \$0 - \$200 or if the asset qualifies as an excepted investment fund (EIF). Amounts of income are not required for a spouse's earned income (excluding honoraria).

6. Other Assets and Income

Part 6 discloses each asset, not already reported, (1) that ended the reporting period with a value greater than \$1,000 or (2) from which more than \$200 in investment income was received during the reporting period. For purposes of the value and income thresholds, the filer aggregates the filer's interests with those of the filer's spouse and dependent children.

This section does not include the following types of assets: (1) a personal residence (unless it was rented out during the reporting period); (2) income or retirement benefits associated with United States Government employment (e.g., Thrift Savings Plan); and (3) cash accounts (e.g., checking, savings, money market accounts) at a single financial institution with a value of \$5,000 or less (unless more than \$200 in income was received). Additional exceptions apply. Note: The type of income is not required if the amount of income is \$0 - \$200 or if the asset qualifies as an excepted investment fund (EIF).

7. Transactions

Part 7 discloses purchases, sales, or exchanges of real property or securities in excess of \$1,000 made on behalf of the filer, the filer's spouse or dependent child during the reporting period.

This section does not include transactions that concern the following: (1) a personal residence, unless rented out; (2) cash accounts (e.g., checking, savings, CDs, money market accounts) and money market mutual funds; (3) Treasury bills, bonds, and notes; and (4) holdings within a federal Thrift Savings Plan account. Additional exceptions apply.

8. Liabilities

Part 8 discloses liabilities over \$10,000 that the filer, the filer's spouse or dependent child owed at any time during the reporting period.

This section does not include the following types of liabilities: (1) mortgages on a personal residence, unless rented out (note: certain PAS nominees and appointees are required to report all mortgages); (2) loans secured by a personal motor vehicle, household furniture, or appliances, unless the loan exceeds the item's purchase price; and (3) revolving charge accounts, such as credit card balances, if the outstanding liability did not exceed \$10,000 at the end of the reporting period. Additional exceptions apply.

9. Gifts and Travel Reimbursements

This section discloses:

- Gifts totaling more than \$480 that the filer, the filer's spouse, and dependent children received from any one source during the reporting period.
- Travel reimbursements totaling more than \$480 that the filer, the filer's spouse, and dependent children received from any one source during the reporting period.

For purposes of this section, the filer need not aggregate any gift or travel reimbursement with a value of \$192 or less. Regardless of the value, this section does not include the following items: (1) anything received from relatives; (2) anything received from the United States Government or from the District of Columbia, state, or local governments; (3) bequests and other forms of inheritance; (4) gifts and travel reimbursements given to the filer's agency in connection with the filer's official travel; (5) gifts of hospitality (food, lodging, entertainment) at the donor's residence or personal premises; and (6) anything received by the filer's spouse or dependent children totally independent of their relationship to the filer. Additional exceptions apply.

Privacy Act Statement

5 U.S.C. § 13101 et seq., and 5 C.F.R. Part 2634 of the U. S. Office of Government Ethics regulations require the reporting of this information. Failure to provide the requested information may result in separation, disciplinary action, or civil action. The primary use of the information on this report is for review by Government officials to determine compliance with applicable Federal laws and regulations. This report may also be disclosed upon request to any requesting person in accordance with 5 U.S.C. §§ 13107 and 13122(b)(1) or as otherwise authorized by law. You may inspect applications for public access of your own form upon request. Additional disclosures of the information on this report may be made: (1) to any requesting person, subject to the limitation contained in section 208(c)(1) of title 18, any determination granting an exemption pursuant to sections 208(b)(1) and 208(b)(3) of title 18; (2) to a Federal, State, or local law enforcement agency if the disclosing agency becomes aware of violations or potential violations of law or regulation; (3) to a source when necessary to obtain information relevant to a conflict of interest investigation or determination; (4) to the National Archives and Records Administration or the General Services Administration in records management inspections; (5) to the Office of Management and Budget during legislative coordination on private relief legislation; (6) when the disclosing agency determines that the records are arguably relevant to a proceeding before a court, grand jury, or administrative or adjudicative body, or in a proceeding before an administrative or adjudicative body when the adjudicator determines the records to be relevant to the proceeding; (7) to reviewing officials in a new office, department or agency when an employee transfers or is detailed from one covered position to another, a public financial disclosure report and any accompanying documents, including statements notifying an employee's supervising ethics office of the commencement of negotiations for future employment or compensation or of an agreement for future employment or compensation; (8) to a Member of Congress or a congressional office in response to an inquiry made on behalf of and at the request of an individual who is the subject of the record; (9) to contractors and other non-Government employees working on a contract, service or assignment for the Federal Government when necessary to accomplish a function related to this system of records; (10) on the OGE Website and to any person, department or agency, any written ethics agreement, including certifications of ethics agreement compliance, filed with OGE by an individual nominated by the President to a position requiring Senate confirmation; (11) on the OGE Website and to any person, department or agency, any certificate of divestiture issued by OGE; (12) on the OGE Website and to any person, department or agency, any waiver of the restrictions contained in Executive Order 13989 or any superseding executive order; (13) to appropriate agencies, entities and persons when there has been a suspected or confirmed breach of the system of records, the agency maintaining the records has determined that there is a risk of harm to individuals, the agency, the Federal Government, or national security, and the disclosure is reasonably necessary to assist in connection with the agency's efforts to respond to the suspected or confirmed breach or to prevent, minimize, or remedy such harm; and (14) to another Federal agency or Federal entity, when the agency maintaining the record determines that information from this system of records is reasonably necessary to assist the recipient agency or entity in responding to a suspected or confirmed breach or in preventing, minimizing, or remedying the risk of harm to individuals, the recipient agency or entity, the Federal Government, or national security. See also the OGE/GOVT-1 executive branch-wide Privacy Act system of records.

Public Burden Information

This collection of information is estimated to take an average of ten hours per response, including time for reviewing the instructions, gathering the data needed, and completing the form. Send comments regarding the burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the Program Counsel, U.S. Office of Government Ethics (OGE) 250 E Street, S.W., Suite 750, Washington, DC 20024-3249.

Pursuant to the Paperwork Reduction Act, as amended, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and no person is required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB (that control number 3209-0001, is displayed here and at the top of the first page of this OGE Form 278e).

April 5, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman, Chairman Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar:

The Ethics in Government Act of 1978 (the Act), as amended, provides that Presidential nominees for a position requiring the advice and consent of the Senate shall provide any necessary updates to their public financial disclosure report with respect to any outside earned income and honoraria received through the period ending no more than five days prior to the commencement of the Senate hearing of their nomination. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 13103(b)(1) and 5 C.F.R. § 2634.606(a).

Please be advised that I have informed the appropriate ethics officials that the information required by section 102(a)(1)(A) of the Act with respect to income and honoraria contained in OGE Form 278e (Executive Branch Public Financial Disclosure Report) executed by me on February 10, 2025, is current as of April 5, 2025. This date is within five days prior to the date of the hearing scheduled to consider my nomination.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tyler Clarkson

cc: Stuart Bender, Designated Agency Ethics Official and Director, USDA Office of Ethics

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

APRIL 8, 2025

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Nomination Hearing
April 8, 2025
Questions for the Record

The Honorable Stephen Vaden

Senator Amy Klobuchar

1. **Disbursement of Funds:** This Administration has paused the disbursement of significant amounts of funds appropriated by Congress. If confirmed, will you commit to implement all USDA programs and administer all funds to USDA as appropriated?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

2. **Responsiveness to Congress:** If you are confirmed, do you agree to:

- a. Promptly reply to any request for information, data, or technical assistance from members of this Committee or any duly constituted committee of Congress and provide the requested information?

To the maximum extent practicable, yes.

- b. Notify the Committee in advance of any major changes, including but not limited to program pauses or terminations, reprogramming of funds, layoffs, office closures or relocations, or other significant actions affecting offices or programs?

To the maximum extent practicable, yes.

- c. Provide to this Committee any reports provided by USDA to the Senate Appropriations Committee or the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee?

To the maximum extent practicable, yes.

- d. Provide regular reports to this Committee showing the Commodity Credit Corporation balance and spending by program?

To the maximum extent practicable, yes.

3. **Congressional Notification:** If confirmed, do you commit to complying with any Congressional notification requirements under law, including those involving Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and Rural Development field

office closures?

Yes.

4. **Oversight:** The Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Inspectors General play a critical role in providing oversight of the executive branch, regardless of Administration.

- a. Will you commit to responding promptly and thoroughly to GAO and the Inspector General on all oversight requests?

Yes.

5. **Scientific Integrity:**

- a. Do you believe that changes in climate present a threat to American farmers and ranchers? If so, how?

While the climate does change throughout the years, the cause and solutions are not widely understood or defined.

- b. Do you believe that changes in climate are due to human activity?

As mentioned in my staff interview, and as stated during my Senate Judiciary process in 2020, I am aware that a large majority of scientific studies show a relationship between changes in the climate and human activity.

- c. Do you believe vaccines are effective tools to control disease and improve human and animal health?

Yes.

- d. If confirmed, will you commit to not interfering with scientific research, including the publication and dissemination of scientific research?

I will commit to making certain the Department uses sound data and science in its research and adheres to the law.

6. **Rule of Law:** If confirmed, will you comply with all court orders?

Yes.

7. **Rural Communities:** USDA is often seen as the leading agency advocating for rural America.

- a. How would you work to ensure federal programs are more accessible to rural communities that need them most?

If confirmed, I will work to ensure programs and policies under the purview of the U.S. Department of Agriculture are implemented as the law prescribes.

- b. Will you commit to ensuring that the President's budget requests provide the necessary funding for the Rural Development grant and loan programs that our rural communities need?

While I do not want to get ahead of the President and the Secretary, if confirmed, I do commit to working with the Secretary, the Office of Management and Budget, and other interested parties to help craft the Department's budget.

- 8. **Tariffs:** How should the Department respond to market disruptions caused by the Administration's tariffs proposal?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the President, the Secretary, and the U.S. Trade Representative to ensure the Department uses every tool at its disposal to help American agriculture thrive amidst complex trade dynamics, including by expanding markets through trade missions and programs like the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program.

- a. How will you ensure that USDA's response to these or other tariffs will protect and support American farmers and ranchers, including on small and mid-scale producers?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the President, the Secretary, and the U.S. Trade Representative to ensure the Department uses every tool at its disposal to help American agriculture thrive amidst complex trade dynamics, including by expanding markets through trade missions and programs like the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program.

- b. How would you plan to address the implications of new tariffs on rural communities?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the President, the Secretary, and the U.S. Trade Representative to ensure the Department uses every tool at its disposal to help American agriculture thrive amidst complex trade dynamics, including by expanding markets through trade missions and programs like the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program.

- 9. **Farm Bill:** The Farm Bill is a complex piece of legislation with a broad, bipartisan coalition of farm and nutrition groups, as well as conservation, rural development, energy, and research groups. Will you support keeping this Farm Bill coalition together

and will you oppose efforts to split the Farm Bill?

If confirmed, I will take direction from the President, the Secretary, Congress, and other executive agencies to ensure programs that support farmers, ranchers, foresters, and consumers continue.

10. **Staffing:** Reporting suggests that the Department has cut many positions, has terminated or placed on administrative leave probationary employees, and instituted a hiring freeze.

- a. How will you prevent these changes from interrupting or preventing the Department from responding to and delivering services to farmers, families, and rural Americans?

I do not want to get ahead of the President or the Secretary, however, if confirmed, I do commit to working with the Secretary, the Department, and partners to make sure the agency is carrying out its congressionally mandated activities.

- b. How will you prevent these changes from disrupting customer service and program delivery?

I do not want to get ahead of the President or the Secretary, however, if confirmed, I do commit to working with the Secretary, the Department, and partners to make sure the agency is carrying out its congressionally mandated activities.

- c. Will you agree not to terminate or renegotiate any existing USDA collective bargaining agreements before such agreements expire?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

11. **Crops and commodities:** How will you ensure that all crops and commodities are treated fairly at USDA?

If confirmed, I will work to ensure programs and policies under the purview of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including those impacting all crops and commodities, are implemented as the law prescribes.

12. **Nutrition:** The Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service was established at USDA almost 60 years ago and oversees the nation's domestic nutrition programs that provide food assistance to one in four Americans, many of whom are children, seniors, or veterans who struggle to access adequate food for themselves and their families. These

programs each play an important role in improving the health and well-being of families and the economy.

- a. Will you commit to keeping these nutrition programs at USDA?

If confirmed, I would support keeping them at USDA. However, it is also important to collaborate with other agencies who support similar populations and communities.

- b. Will you commit to support funding for all of the nutrition programs at USDA and work with Congress to protect access to these programs and prevent changes that would reduce effectiveness?

I do not want to get ahead of the President as he works to finalize a budget. If confirmed, I commit to working with the Secretary, the agency, and interested stakeholders to make all USDA nutrition programs effective.

13. **Nutrition:** The 2018 Farm Bill required a reevaluation of the Thrifty Food Plan every 5 years, based on current food prices, food composition data, consumption patterns, and dietary guidance. In 2021, USDA reevaluated the Thrifty Food Plan, which resulted in a modest increase of \$1.35 per day for SNAP benefits. Do you believe SNAP benefits should be calculated based on current food prices for a healthy diet, as statutorily required by the 2018 Farm Bill?

Yes. If confirmed, I intend to prioritize a review of the 2021 process and outcome and any work on the 2026 update initiated under the prior administration.

14. **Nutrition:** The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, nutrition education, and health care referrals to low-income pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and young children at nutritional risk.

Since the 1990s, every presidential administration has supported fully funding the program to meet the needs of all eligible families who seek services. If confirmed, will you commit to supporting full funding for WIC to continue serving all eligible families who seek services?

I do not want to get ahead of the President as he works to finalize a budget; however, if confirmed, I commit to working with the Secretary, the agency, and interested stakeholders to make all USDA nutrition programs effective.

- b. Currently, state WIC programs are implementing an updated food package to better align WIC foods with the latest nutrition science and give WIC participants more choices at the grocery store. If confirmed, will you commit to supporting states in continuing to implement the food package updates without delay?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

15. **Nutrition:** The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) provides school districts the option of serving meals at no charge during the school day in high-need schools and school districts. Nearly 20 million children across the country attend schools that have adopted CEP.

Will you commit to opposing changes to CEP that would increase burdens on children and families that participate in school meal programs?

I do not want to get ahead of the President as he works to implement his agenda; however, if confirmed, I do commit to working with the Secretary, the agency, and interested stakeholders to make all USDA nutrition programs effective.

16. **Farm Programs:** During your previous tenure at USDA, budget proposals included suggestions to cut farm programs or make crop insurance more expensive for farmers.

- a. Do you support cutting farm subsidy programs or the Federal crop insurance program?

As a farmer, I understand the importance of a robust farm safety net. If confirmed, I plan to work closely with the President, the Secretary, the agency, and stakeholders to make certain the Department prioritizes a strong and resilient farm economy.

- b. Would you support similar proposals in future budget requests to Congress?

I do not want to get ahead of the President as he works to finalize a budget; however, if confirmed, I commit to working with the Secretary, the agency, and interested stakeholders to make all USDA farm programs effective.

17. **International Food Aid:** The United States has long been a leader in the fight against global hunger. Minnesota farmers support critical programs like Food for Peace and McGovern-Dole Food for Education which for decades have helped American farmers feed hungry people and support fellow farmers around the world.

- a. Do you believe the USDA's global food security programs and the USAID's Food for Peace program are important to supporting American farmers?

For more than 70 years, American-grown commodities have been the centerpiece of USDA and USAID global food security programs. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to find ways to support market access for American farmers, including through international food aid programs.

Will you commit to supporting these programs and ensuring these programs have the resources and staff necessary for implementing their programming?

For more than 70 years, American-grown commodities have been the centerpiece of USDA and USAID global food security programs. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to find ways to support market access for American farmers, including through international food aid programs.

18. **Forestry:** In recent years, the Forest Service has spent months at a time at Preparedness Level 4 and 5, indicating that staffing levels were stretched to a breaking point. There have also been recent news reports that the Forest Service will be consolidating regions and cutting additional staff.

- a. How will you ensure that any reorganization or staffing changes will not impede the Forest Service's ability to continue to carry out all of its congressionally mandated activities?

I do not want to get ahead of the President or the Secretary; however, if confirmed, I commit to working with the Secretary, the agency, and partners to make sure the agency is carrying out its congressionally mandated activities.

- b. Do you commit to ensuring that the Forest Service, regardless of any reorganization or staffing changes, will be able to carry out all activities required under applicable statutes and regulations?

Yes, if confirmed, I commit to working with the Secretary, the agency, state, tribal, and local government partners to make sure the Forest Service is carrying out all activities required by law.

19. **Conservation:** For 40 years conservation compliance policies in farm programs have protected some of our nation's most sensitive agricultural lands and natural resources.

- a. Will you commit to maintaining the conservation provisions that farmers agree to in return for receiving commodity and crop insurance support?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

- b. Will you continue to enforce the "sodsaver" provisions in crop insurance that protect native grasslands from conversion to agricultural production in Minnesota, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

Senator Michael Bennet

1. Farmers, ranchers, and rural communities across my state are feeling the consequences of the USDA's funding freezes, cuts, and staff reductions. The people I serve expect the USDA to show up—and right now, in too many places, programs are stalled, and the workforce is stretched too thin.

- a. What specific steps will you take to ensure that programs continue without disruption during any workforce reductions?

Because I am not at the Department, I am not aware of the details of this question; however, I commit to making certain the Department does not compromise its duties as outlined in law.

What specific steps will you take to ensure that programs continue without disruption during any closures and/or consolidations of offices in DC or across the country?

Because I am not at the Department, I am not aware of the details of this question; however, I commit to making certain the Department does not compromise its duties as outlined in law.

2. As Deputy Secretary, you will play a key role in shaping and guiding the implementation of the next Farm Bill—legislation that will set the course for agriculture and rural communities for years to come.

- a. How will you interpret and carry out Congressional intent when the USDA begins implementing this critical law?

If confirmed, I will follow the law as prescribed in the Farm Bill.

3. Reducing staff and restructuring the Forest Service could increase the risk of wildfire, weaken the health of our watersheds, and threaten local economies.

- a. Do you support proposals to reduce staff?

It was widely reported in the media the Forest Service was facing a large budget deficit. Although I am not familiar with the specifics of their budget.

If confirmed, I commit to ensuring the Forest Service can carry out its mission critical work and maintains operational readiness for wildfire.

- b. Do you support proposals to combine national forests?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary or agency leadership; however, if confirmed, I do commit to ensuring the Forest Service can carry out its mission critical work and deliver services to the American people.

c. Do you support proposals to merge any forest service regions?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary or agency leadership; however, if confirmed, I do commit to ensuring the Forest Service can carry out its mission critical work and deliver services to the American people.

d. Do you support proposals to restructure the forest service?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary or agency leadership; however, if confirmed, I do commit to ensuring the Forest Service can carry out its mission critical work and deliver services to the American people.

e. What information will you evaluate before making staffing and restructuring decisions?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary or agency leadership; however, if confirmed, I do commit to ensuring the Forest Service can carry out its mission critical work and deliver services to the American people.

The public memorandum from the Office of Management and Budget and Office of Personnel Management outlines very specific steps to evaluate when making staffing and restructuring decisions. I do commit to following the direction provided by the Executive Branch and the Secretary.

f. What specific steps will you take to ensure any reduction in force does not affect the agency's ability to respond to wildfires, manage visitation, or do forest management work this summer?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary or agency leadership; however, if confirmed, I do commit to ensuring the Forest Service can carry out its mission critical work and deliver services to the American people.

4. President Trump signed an Executive Order that requires each agency to hire no more than one employee for every four employees who depart.

a. Will you advocate for exceptions to the current four-to-one hiring freeze, especially for positions in the Forest Service and critical field offices that directly serve producers and manage public lands?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary or agency leadership; however, if confirmed, I do commit to ensuring the Forest Service has the resources it needs to carry out its mission critical work and service delivery to the American people. I also commit to advocating for hiring exemptions where needed, especially when

it comes to public safety and emergency management.

5. During your time as General Counsel, you defended the decision to relocate the Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. This decision resulted in a substantial loss of key researchers and other essential staff. GAO also concluded that this decision was not fully consistent with an evidence-based approach.

- a. Do you support proposals to reorganize or relocate any USDA agencies or offices? If so, which agencies or offices?

While I do not know the details of proposals currently being considered by the Department, I believe American farmers and ranchers are better served by USDA when employees are closer to the customers they serve.

- b. What information will you consider before making any decisions about USDA's structure and locations?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary; however, if confirmed, I do commit to ensuring the Department can carry out its mission critical work and deliver services to the American people.

The public memorandum from the Office of Management and Budget and Office of Personnel Management outlines very specific steps to evaluate when making staffing and restructuring decisions. I commit to following the direction provided by the Executive Branch and the Secretary.

How will you factor in potential costs related to the attrition of staff or the disruption of agencies' activities due to relocations or reorganizations?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary; however, if confirmed, I do commit to ensuring the Department can carry out its mission critical work and deliver services to the American people.

6. Climate change continues to have a devastating effect on farmers across the country, from severe drought to floods and fires to late freezes and changing pest pressures. In previous statements submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee, you said, "I am aware that the large majority of scientific studies link human activity to the changing climate."

- a. Can you confirm you believe there is a link between human activity and a changing climate?

As mentioned in my staff interview, and as stated during my Senate Judiciary process in 2020, I am aware that a large majority of scientific studies show a relationship between changes in the climate and human activity.

- b. Do you believe that climate change presents a serious threat to American farmers and ranchers? If so, how? If not, why not?

While the climate does change throughout the year, the cause and solutions are not widely understood or defined.

- c. What role do you believe USDA's research agencies play in making sure American farmers and ranchers have the tools they need to succeed in the face of a changing climate?

USDA research agencies help find solutions to challenges faced by American farmers and ranchers.

- d. If confirmed, will you commit to not interfering with scientific research, including the publication and dissemination of scientific research relating to climate change?

I will commit to making certain the Department uses sound data and science in its research and adheres to the law.

Senator Tina Smith

1. For years, the USDA has been investing in farmers and rural small business through a relatively small but important Farm Bill program, the Rural Energy for America Program, or REAP. REAP is a popular, successful and bipartisan program for a reason. For example, planned investments to help farms and rural small businesses in Minnesota this past year will save people thousands of dollars annually and create enough energy savings to power more than 15,000 homes. In this way, these investments will help farmers and business owners save money and improve their bottom lines while reducing harmful carbon emissions. USDA held up REAP payments for months. This was after farmers fronted thousands of their own dollars after signing agreements with USDA. USDA recently sent notice that they have unfrozen the payments that farmers were waiting on. However, the instructions for how farmers can now access their payments caused even more confusion and uncertainty, making it even harder for farmers to know what hoops they still have to jump through to get the money they were already promised.
 - a. It appears that USDA is adding additional red tape and creating more confusion for farmers that simply want agreements they already signed with USDA to be upheld. If confirmed, will you make sure that these farmers that are waiting get the funds that they were promised?

If confirmed, I commit to following the law.

2. According to the USDA website, USDA field offices are “where you can typically meet face-to-face with staff from USDA's Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service to discuss your vision, goals, and ways USDA can help. For your convenience, both agencies are usually located in the same Service Center.” Farmers rely on their local USDA office staff to understand their risk management options, sign up for assistance programs, and discuss their conservation plans. The local USDA field office also is a place where producers can speak face-to-face with a person that understands what it takes to run a farming operation. Despite this important work, many FSA and NRCS positions in local offices have been eliminated over the past few weeks. Combined with the fact that many USDA field offices are now on the closure list, like the one in Baudette, Minnesota that serves 5,000 square miles in Lake of the Woods and Koochiching Counties. The consequences of an understaffed USDA on not just the farm economy – but the rural economy as well – is staggering, especially as farmers are going to need help navigating their options in the face of retaliatory tariffs.

- a. What role do you think a local USDA county office plays for farmers?

As a farmer, I understand the benefit of a county office and the service it delivers. If confirmed, I commit to making certain the Farm Services Agency has the resources it needs to carry out its mission critical work to deliver services to the American producer.

- b. If there are no USDA field offices to visit and if there are no USDA staff farming communities, how will that impact farmers' ability to access credit, understand their safety-net options, or get guidance for their conservation projects?

As stated, I commit to making certain the Farm Services Agency has the resources it needs to carry out its mission critical work and service delivery to the American producer.

3. It's no secret that one of the biggest factors causing rising input costs is the lack of options farmers face when looking to buy their inputs, including fertilizer and seeds. And on the processing and marketing side of farming it is the same thing. There are fewer and fewer options for farmers to send their animals to be processed and their goods to be marketed. Ag industry consolidation has resulted in farmers receiving just 14.9 cents of every food dollar that consumers pay. Costs like marketing, processing, transportation, and others now account for nearly 85 cents of every food dollar spent in the United States. Producers, especially beginning farmers, are getting squeezed on both ends of farming, from inputs to harvest to marketing.

- a. What is your plan as Deputy Secretary to help farmers facing rampant consolidation across the ag sector?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary or agency leadership; but if confirmed, I commit to making certain all American farmers, ranchers, and foresters have the resources needed to carry out their critical work — providing the nation and

world with the safest, most affordable, and most abundant food supply.

Senator Richard Durbin

1. Publicly-funded research on food and agriculture in the United States has dropped in the past 30 years, while Chinese investments in publicly-funded agriculture research has risen eight times, surpassing U.S investments ten years ago. China is now the world's largest funder of public agriculture research. A 2021 report from the American Farm Bureau Federation says this is a serious threat to the competitive of U.S. food and agriculture. For several years, Senator Jerry Moran of Kansas and I have introduced the *American Grows Act* to require a five percent increase, plus inflation, each year, for ten years, to rebuild and reinvigorate strong federal research dollars for agriculture.

During the 1930s farm crisis, USDA created a network of four research labs, one in Peoria, Illinois, to create new markets for crops. Today it's a network of 90 locations known for top-level scientists and pioneering breakthroughs. This research directly contributed to the growth of American agricultural output, which grew 175% between 1948 and 2019, or 1.42 percent a year, per USDA's calculations.

I am very concerned with the actions taken by USDA since January that risks greatly crippling American competitiveness in farm research at these USDA labs by terminating employees, scientists, and critical research programs, and overall creating major disruptions. I am also greatly concerned with reports that the Agriculture Research Service could face massive layoffs or reductions in force. These scientists and their expertise cannot be replaced and are the foundation of the global strength and leadership of U.S. agriculture.

- a. Do you agree with the American Farm Bureau Federation report?

Although I have not read the full report, I do agree that China remains a serious threat to American agriculture.

- b. Do you believe USDA-funded research is important to the American farmer?

Research that directly benefits producers and improves productivity and efficiency is beneficial to American agriculture.

- c. If you are confirmed, will you commit to rehiring and keeping the outstanding scientists at the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research in Peoria, Illinois, and ensuring that the research conducted there is preserved and expanded?

It is my understanding via public sources that all probationary employees have been reinstated pursuant to the Merit Systems Protection Board stay on their termination.

Funding for the Agricultural Research Service, including the work conducted at the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, comes from Congress through the annual appropriations process.

2. Illinois is number one in the nation, and number four in the world, for soybean production. A big reason why Illinois and the U.S. maintains global competitiveness is our investments in research. I am very concerned about proposed cuts to the USDA National Plant Germplasm System, which stores thousands of genetic varieties of seeds and living plants on a wide range of crops.

The University of Illinois is home to a collection focused on soybean genetics, the National Soybean Germplasm Collection, funded by USDA Agriculture Research Service. This is the only operation of its kind in the world for soybeans, open to all scientists. China has the only other soybean genetics operations, which I am told, remains closed to other researchers. The work by these University of Illinois and ARS-funded scientists are absolutely critical to understand crop diseases, improve yields, improve nutritional qualities, develop new crops, and create value-added new markets for farmers. Many genetic samples are specific to growing strong crops in key environments. There are emerging diseases in soybeans for which there are no resistance in modern genetics and the answers can only be found in the research underway at this laboratory. This living collection cannot be suspended and stored away in refrigerators should there be disruptions in its operations from cuts in funding or staff, much of this collection is living and actually grown in the field each year. If lost, many of these collections can never be reassembled or recollected, as they come from politically isolated regions of the world, or from locations where wild relatives of soybeans have become extinct.

Unpredictable funding decisions made in the past several months by USDA has disrupted the work and lives of dedicated and loyal scientists at this operation. Damaging this genetic bank will put the U.S. at an alarming economic disadvantage to competitors like Brazil and China. News reports have indicated that the National Plant Germplasm System costs eight one hundredths of a percent (0.0008%) of the federal budget but protects and improves our food system worth \$1.5 trillion. If the U.S. loses this inventory, it cannot be replaced. If these disruptions continue, it will cripple soybean research.

- a. If you are confirmed, will you commit to rehiring and keeping these outstanding scientists and maintaining the full operations of the National Soybean Germplasm Collection?

The Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 requires USDA to carry out a National Genetic Resources Program. If confirmed, I will follow the law.

3. During the hearing there was an exchange where the need to follow the law and enforce the statutory work requirements that are a condition of receiving SNAP assistance was highlighted. There are similar conditions on programs for farmers and ranchers.

FSA commodity programs contain "actively engaged in farming" requirements that parallel the work requirements in the nutrition programs and require participants to contribute labor or management to the farming operation and restrict the number of managers. There are different definitions of labor and management and record keeping requirements for entities made up of exclusively family members versus non-family members, with the non-family member definitions and requirements being more specific. In 2020, the Trump Administration issued a final rule that consolidated the definitions and record keeping requirements for farm program eligibility, so there would not be the confusion of two different definitions and sets of procedures while maintaining a limit on the number of management-related payment limits for only non-family entities. This final rule was subsequently repealed a few months later by the same administration despite the improved efficiency from having one set of standards.

- a. What was your role in this proposed rule and subsequent repeal?

The Office of General Counsel provided legal advice on implementing the policy changes referenced.

4. In the context of the nutrition programs it appears that the flexibility and waivers for work requirements, despite being contemplated in statute, were a concern.

- a. Is this desire for clearer rules with less flexibility extend to farm programs and their labor and management rules? If not, why not?

If confirmed, I will follow the laws set forth by Congress.

5. The USDA possesses detailed records on farmers and ranchers, which can range from assets, property locations, income levels, USDA payments, addresses, telephone numbers. There also are about 2,124 county offices operated by USDA where many staff personally know the farmers in their county.

Elon Musk, and DOGE have gained access to private data of everyday Americans using the Social Security Administration, the Treasury Departments' payment systems, and the Internal Revenue Service, saying they are investigating claims of waste, fraud, and abuse, or that immigrants are abusing these systems. Also, the Secretary of Defense, and President Trump's top military advisors, have discussed classified military information on unsecured iPhone texts, exposing that sensitive information to a reporter.

- a. Are farmers at risk for DOGE staff to examine their private personal information, or for USDA to reveal that private data to the public?

As I am not at the Department, I am not aware of what access DOGE has to data.

6. In the previous Trump Administration, you were involved in moving two USDA research offices (the National Institutes of Food and Agriculture, and Economic Research Service), from Washington D.C. to Kansas City. You participated in transferring federal funds for this purpose without Congressional approval, stating USDA is not bound by laws requiring it to secure Congressional approval to relocate facilities, and that the law governing this issue was unconstitutional. A 2019 USDA Inspector General report concluded that your viewpoint was not consistent with prior positions taken by the Department.

- a. Do you believe that USDA could have notified the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations under the provision and reached an informal understanding with those Committees prior to USDA taking any action, in order to effectuate Congressional intent? If so, why did USDA not do so prior to the ERS and NIFA move? If not, why?

It is my recollection USDA notified Congress at least one year prior to any employee relocation.

- b. Do you acknowledge the authority of Congressional appropriators, and if confirmed, will you comply with Congressional intent?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

7. Given your previous management experience at USDA,

- a. Do you think that any of the current functions performed by federal employees at USDA should be privatized?

I am not sure what has happened at the Department since my departure in 2020, however if there are functions that can become more efficient, or more effective for the customer, or more accountable to the taxpayer, I am willing to explore those options.

- b. If so, which activities or programs do you believe should be privatized and why do you think privatizing those activities would be beneficial?

I am not sure what has happened at the Department since my departure in 2020, however if there are functions that can become more efficient, or more effective for the customer, or more accountable to the taxpayer, I am willing to explore those options.

- c. Were there any functions that you streamlined or privatized during your previous tenure at USDA? If so, can you please describe the streamlining and privatization efforts and why you thought those changes were beneficial.

The Office of General Counsel moved to using private outside counsel to assist with loan resolutions. This emulated the same process used in the private sector for these types of legal matters. Thus, when USDA agencies determined that further efforts to workout the loan were futile, the Office of General Counsel could respond more quickly to protect the taxpayers' investment.

8. During your previous time at USDA, many of the organizational changes implemented by the Administration were challenged by unions.

- a. Given your experience, what are your views on the role of unions and collective bargaining rights for USDA employees?

Government employee unions' roles are elucidated in federal law. If confirmed, I will follow the law.

- b. Do you believe that it is important for workers in both the public and private sector to have collective bargaining rights?

The law provides public and private employees with bargaining rights. I believe it is important to follow the law.

- c. If confirmed, do you commit not to terminate or renegotiate any existing USDA collective bargaining agreements before such agreements expire? If not, why not?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

9. Do you believe it would be lawful for USDA, its agencies, offices, or employees to deny funding to, withhold benefits from, or administratively investigate a person based on their political beliefs, their political speech, or their filing of a lawsuit against the Federal government?

No, this would be a violation of law.

10. Employee morale at USDA's Office the General Counsel plummeted during your previous tenure at USDA. In 2020, OGC ranked nearly at the bottom of the list of "Best Places to Work" (408th out of 411 for federal subagency components). The score for effective leadership of OGC and support for diversity also plummeted during that time.

- a. In your opinion, why did employee morale experience such a significant decline under during your previous time at USDA?

The shift in morale was likely caused by an upending of the status quo, whereby the prospect of remote work and promotion based squarely on seniority shifted to

an expectation of a more collaborative, in-office work environment and merit-based hiring and promotion.

- b. Do you think employee morale is important to an organization's success? If not, why not?

Yes.

- c. Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently during your previous tenure that you think would have improved employee morale?

No, because service delivery and collaboration are so important to the success of the Department.

- 11. USDA is currently undergoing massive layoffs and there have been recent news reports about most of the employee currently working in the USDA headquarters being relocated to hubs across the country. (<https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/04/usda-slash-headquarters-other-staff-and-relocate-some-new-hubs-around-country/404371/USDA>). I have deep concerns what this means to the USDA workforce and the morale and productivity of the employees who do remain.

- a. If confirmed, what would you do as Deputy Secretary to improve employee morale at USDA?

If confirmed, I look forward to immediate briefings on all actions to date, personnel or otherwise, and will create an action plan based on those briefings.

Senator Cory Booker

- 1. Have you ever discussed any of the discrimination claims against USDA or any of its officials brought by the Wisconsin Institute Law and Liberty, the Pacific Legal Foundation, or America First Legal Foundation with individuals affiliated with these entities?

No.

- a. If so, whom did you talk to at those entities, which claims did you discuss, and what was the nature of those discussions?

Not applicable.

- b. Do you believe that the claims brought by those entities against USDA were meritorious? If so, why?

Because I remain a sitting Federal judge, I cannot comment on the merits of matters pending or that may come before the courts.

2. Did anyone in President Trump's transition team or anyone in this Administration, including at the White House, ever ask you about your loyalty to President Trump, your voting history, or ask for any commitments in accepting this nomination? If so, by whom and what was your response?

No.

3. Do you believe that it would be lawful for USDA to make hiring or rehiring decisions based on either the political affiliation of the individual or based on a stakeholder requesting the hiring or rehiring of that individual?

No, this would be a violation of law.

4. Were any specific complaints made against you regarding your personal or professional conduct during your tenure as General Counsel at USDA? If so, please provide details of those complaints with appropriate redactions of personally identifiable information?

Thank you for the question. Please see my response, which has not changed, found within the confidential questionnaire associated with my 2020 Judiciary nomination.

5. In February, President Trump issued an executive order establishing a Make America Healthy Again Commission, which includes USDA. Broadly, how do you see USDA working with farmers to ensure that U.S. food is "the healthiest, most abundant, and most affordable in the world," as directed by the executive order?

If confirmed, I look forward to briefings on all MAHA-related actions to date, across the Department, and will be happy to discuss further plans with your office.

6. There have been concerns about investors and companies purchasing U.S. farmland, using farmland for purposes such as building data centers, and making farmland less accessible and affordable for farmers, especially for small and beginning farmers. Do you believe that there is a role for the federal government, including USDA, to play to help small and beginning farmers, including making farmland accessible to small and beginning farmers? If so, what do you think that role should be?

There are several programs authorized by Congress that support small and beginning farmers. If confirmed, I will follow those statutes, and work with the appropriate mission areas to gauge their efficacy.

7. There have been recent news reports about massive layoffs at USDA and I am concerned how this may affect USDA's functions related to Tribal relations.

- a. If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, will you commit to USDA consulting with Tribes and Tribal stakeholders to determine how any administrative or personnel changes across the Department may impact services to Indian Country prior to implementing these changes?

The USDA Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) is responsible for government-to-government relations between USDA and tribes. If confirmed, I look forward to connecting with the OTR team and assessing all personnel and policy actions to date.

- b. If confirmed, will you commit to ensuring that any reorganization of personnel handling Tribal Relations or handling programs that involve Tribes or Tribal producers within USDA will not hinder nation-to-nation communication, Tribal consultations, or Tribal services?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

8. Farm and food workers have extremely hard and often dangerous jobs. What responsibility does USDA have to support our nation's farm and food workers?

If confirmed, I look forward to briefings on all farm and food worker safety assessments to date and commit to following the laws that govern food and farm worker safety.

9. As you may remember, the COVID pandemic led to major disruption in global supply chain and demonstrated the need to diversify and strengthen the highly consolidated domestic food supply chain. The previous Administration made significant investments in domestic food and agriculture supply chains through programs such as the Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program, Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program, Local Meat Capacity Grant Program, Local Food Purchasing Assistance Cooperative Agreement Programs, Regional Food Business Centers, and Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program. These programs support small, mid-sized, and local producers and aim to increase competition within the food and agriculture industry.
 - a. Do you think that consolidation in the domestic food supply chain is a problem? If so, why? If not, why not?

American producers have the safest, most abundant, and most affordable bounties. American consumers enjoy the cheapest food prices in the world. If confirmed, I commit to ensuring those metrics do not change.

Do you think that it is important for USDA to develop and strengthen the domestic food supply chain, especially given President Trump's statement to farmers last month that they should "[g]et ready to start making a lot of agricultural produce to be sold INSIDE of the United States"? If so, what is your plan to develop and strengthen the domestic food supply chain?

American producers have the safest, most abundant, and most affordable bounties. American consumers enjoy the cheapest food prices in the world. If confirmed, I commit to ensuring those metrics do not change. I also look forward to receiving detailed briefings on actions to date and am happy to remain in contact with your office for further discussion.

- b. Do you think that USDA has a role to support small, mid-sized, and local producers? If so, what is your plan to support small, mid-sized, and local producers to ensure they are not crowded out of domestic markets in a trade war, further consolidating the domestic food supply chain?

All of production agriculture has a role to play in our food supply, regardless of size, location, and crop. Each are supported by myriad USDA programs and policies.

- c. If confirmed, will you commit to consider and support small, mid-sized, and local producers, to the maximum extent allowable by law, in all USDA programs and policies?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

- 10. A 2021 GAO report revealed that crop insurance companies have been making above-market returns on farmer premiums, at the expense of taxpayers. The report determined that a more reasonable market-based rate of return could save taxpayers \$7.2 billion over 10 years. The same report showed a highly inefficient use of the \$1.5 billion per year Administrative and Operating Subsidy, which is enriching a handful of companies instead of incentivizing the coverage of uncovered farms as intended.

- a. If confirmed, will you reign in the wasteful spending in the crop insurance program?

If confirmed, I commit to reviewing GAO's assessment.

- b. How will you work to ensure that USDA's crop insurance program is effective and accessible for small, multi-crop, and specialty crop growers, which have historically been poorly served by this program?

If confirmed, I will follow the law and where appropriate, engage with relevant stakeholders to understand where improvements can be made.

11. USDA had a moratorium on farm foreclosures and Congress provided USDA with resources to help distressed borrowers during the past few years to keep farmers farming and that cut bankruptcies by more than half. Do you agree that foreclosure should be the last resort and, if confirmed, would you support efforts to help otherwise viable farms through short-term cash flow challenges? If so, how would you use your role to limit farm foreclosures and keep farmers farming?

If confirmed, I commit to ensuring the Department deals with each borrower fairly and according to law.

12. On April 3, 2025, Secretary Rollins issued Secretary's Memorandum 1078-006, "Increasing Timber Production and Designating an Emergency Situation on National Forest System Lands," which makes an emergency situation determination under section 40807 of the IIJA that designates 112,646,000 acres of National Forest System lands (or 59 percent of all National Forest System lands) as an IIJA emergency situation.

- a. Although IIJA section 40807 doesn't provide express authority, the secretarial memorandum permits federally recognized Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs), and States the ability to request additional areas be included in the emergency situation determination (ESD). What authority allows USDA to provide federally recognized Tribes, ANCs, and States the ability to request additional areas be included in the ESD? What criteria will USDA use to evaluate requests from Tribes, ANCs, and States?

As stated in the Memorandum, it was issued under the authority of the Organic Administration Act of 1897 (16 U.S.C. §§ 472-475, 477-482, 551); Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (16 U.S.C. §§ 528-531), Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended (16 U.S.C. §§ 1601-1613), and the Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 6592c); as well as other statutory authorities governing the management, administration and protection of the National Forest System (NFS).

I am not privy to the specifics of how the agency intends to implement the additional acres provided by Tribes, ANCs, and states; but if confirmed, I commit to learning about the agency's processes and criteria used.

- b. Does the Presidential hiring freeze memorandum of January 20, 2025, limit the Forest Service's ability to use emergency and direct hire authorities, as directed by the secretarial memorandum?

If confirmed, I will follow the direction provided by the President and the Secretary.

- c. What “certain conditions” would permit expedited consultation time frames under the requirement for Tribal consultation?

The agency will follow the law and work with Tribal partners accordingly.

Senator Raphael Warnock

1. Section 5413 of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018¹ requires the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to make the agency’s program application and participation data available to the public through the USDA’s Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Program Statistics query tool (REGStats) and specifically for farm loan programs on the Farm Service Agency website.²

- a. If confirmed, will you commit to following Section 5413 of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 and ensuring that the USDA continues making its program data available to the public through the REGStats tool, including for farm loans?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

2. Georgia farmers and families directly benefit from USDA programs like the Emergency Food Assistance Program, which purchases U-S-grown foods for food banks, as well as the Local Foods for Schools Cooperative Agreement and the Farm to School program, which help schools access locally grown foods. However, reporting indicates that the USDA has recently cut these programs.³
 - a. If confirmed, will you commit to ensuring that these programs receive the funding they were scheduled to receive?

¹ 7 U.S.C. § 2008x.

² REGStats, U.S. Department of Agriculture (2025), <https://www.usda.gov/regstats>.

³ Aimee Picchi, *USDA Cancels \$1 Billion in Funding for Schools and Food Banks to Buy Food from Local Suppliers*, CBS News (Mar. 13, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/usda-cancels-local-food-purchasing-food-banks-school-meals/>; *USDA Halts FY25 Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grants*, School Nutrition Association (Mar. 25, 2025), <https://schoolnutrition.org/sna-news/usda-halts-fy25-patrick-leahy-farm-to-school-grants/>; Leah Douglas, P.J. Huffstutter, and Renee Hickman, *USDA Cuts Hit Food Banks, Rising Hunger for Low-Income Americans* (Mar. 25, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-cuts-hit-struggling-food-banks-risking-hunger-low-income-americans-2025-03-25/>.

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

3. Last year, Congress appropriated \$21 billion to USDA for emergency natural disaster funding to help farmers recovery from disasters like Hurricane Helene. USDA must work swiftly to distribute this economic assistance funding to growers.

- a. If confirmed, how will you work to ensure this disaster assistance is distributed swiftly to our nation's farmers?

Secretary Rollins has publicly announced her intent to rapidly implement this disaster assistance. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting her in this effort.

- b. If confirmed, how will you work to ensure this disaster assistance is distributed equitably to our nation's farmers?

Secretary Rollins has publicly announced her intent to rapidly implement this disaster assistance. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting her in this effort.

4. According to reporting, USDA is planning to close its Washington, D.C. headquarters in Washington, D.C. and lay off thousands of staffers.⁴

- a. If confirmed, and if this closure occurs, how would you ensure USDA can complete its stated vision "to provide economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America to thrive; to promote agriculture production that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve our Nation's natural resources through conservation, restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands."?"⁵

If confirmed, I will request briefings on all personnel and related actions, to date.

- b. How would you work to retain employees who have a wealth of knowledge and years of experience if USDA's headquarters is moved elsewhere?

Institutional knowledge is imperative, and if confirmed, I will request immediate briefings on all personnel and related actions to date.

- c. How many local offices is USDA planning to close? Where will these closures occur?

⁴ Homa Bash, *USDA to Close Down DC Headquarters, Lay Off Thousands of Workers: Report*, Fox 5 Washington DC (Apr. 8, 2025), <https://www.fox5dc.com/news/usda-close-down-dc-headquarters-lay-off-thousands-workers-report>.

⁵ *About USDA*, U.S. Department of Agriculture (2025), <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/general-information/our-agency>.

Because I am not at the Department, I do not know the details of proposals currently being considered by the Department.

5. According to reporting, over 1,000 USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) have opted into the Trump Administration's deferred resignation offer.⁶ APHIS Administrator Mike Watson acknowledged the "significant sudden loss of knowledge and experience" and requested employees stay on through the end of April 2025.⁷

- a. If confirmed, following this mass exodus of federal employees, how will you ensure APHIS can complete its stated mission of "protecting the health, welfare, and value of our Nation's plants, animals, and natural resources?"⁸

I do not know the details of how many APHIS employees opted into the voluntary deferred resignation program; however, if confirmed, I look forward to working with APHIS to ensure USDA is well equipped to protect American agriculture from damaging pests and diseases.

- b. If confirmed, following this mass exodus of federal employees, how will you ensure AMS can complete its stated mission to "administer programs that create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber, and specialty crops?"⁹

I do not know the details of how many AMS employees opted into the voluntary deferred resignation program; however, if confirmed, I look forward to working with AMS to ensure USDA is well equipped to support American agriculture through domestic and international marketing opportunities.

6. Georgia is home to Fort Valley State University, an 1890 Institution that plays a vital role in advancing my state's agriculture industry through education, research, and outreach.¹⁰ Congress has authorized annual capacity grants for 1890 Institutions that require one-to-

⁶ Marcia Brown, *At Least 1,000 Employees Take 'Deferred Resignation' Offer*, PoliticoPro (Apr. 8, 2025), <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/04/1000-usda-employees-take-deferred-resignation-offer-00279839>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Mission*, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (Jan. 31, 2025), <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/mission>

⁹ *About AMS*, Agriculture Marketing Service (2025), <https://www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams>.

¹⁰ *FVSU Is a Land-Grant Institution*, Fort Valley State University (Feb. 28, 2024), <https://www.fvsu.edu/about-fvsu/fvsu-land-grant-institution>.

one nonfederal matching finds.¹¹ However, I am concerned that these critical institutions are not getting their fair share of funding.

- a. If confirmed, will you commit to working with Congress to continue to close the gaps in funding for all 19 of our 1890 Institutions?

The USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is responsible for the implementation of programs for 1890 Institutions, and States are responsible for providing matching funds from nonfederal sources in an amount equal to the amount of federal funds.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with NIFA, State governments, Congress, and the 1890 Institutions on the implementation of statutory programs important to our land-grant universities.

- b. If confirmed, will you commit to protecting the jobs of USDA's liaisons to 1890 Institutions?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with NIFA, State governments, Congress, and the 1890 Institutions on the implementation of statutory programs important to our land-grant universities.

- 7. USDA's Office of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OSCAR) leads efforts to facilitate the fair and equitable treatment of USDA customers and employees, and it enforces civil rights law.¹² On January 21, 2025, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report on USDA's efforts to address internal workplace discrimination complaints, which included three recommendations for the Secretary of Agriculture to take to improve OSCAR's effectiveness and strengthen USDA's response to internal discrimination complaints.¹³

- a. If confirmed, will you commit to reading this report and take seriously the recommendations of this report?

Yes.

¹¹ Genevieve Croft, *1890 Land-Grant Universities: Background and Selected Issues*, Congressional Research Service (Jun. 9, 2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11847/2>.

¹² *Office of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights*, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Jan. 2025), <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/general-information/staff-offices/office-assistant-secretary-civil-rights>.

¹³ *Equal Employment Opportunity: USDA Could Strengthen Efforts to Address Workplace Discrimination Complaints*, Government Accountability Office (Jan. 21, 2025), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-105804>.

- b. If confirmed, how will you work with OSCAR and the Secretary of Agriculture to respond to GAO's recommendations within this report?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with OASCR to understand any actions to date and will partner with the Secretary to devise a pathway forward.

- 8. In March 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act, which included a requirement for USDA to create an Equity Commission, which issued a report in February 2024.¹⁴

- a. If confirmed, will you commit to reading the Equity Commission's final report?

Yes, I commit to read the Equity Commission's final report.

- b. If confirmed, will you seriously consider the recommendations of the Equity Commission's report?

If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing the recommendations in this report and working Secretary Rollins to ensure that every American served by USDA is treated with dignity and respect.

If confirmed, will you work with Secretary Rollins to implement the recommendations of the Equity Commission's report?

If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing the recommendations in this report and working Secretary Rollins to ensure that every American served by USDA is treated with dignity and respect.

- 9. Georgia farmers are subject to several non-tariff barriers. Peanut farmers in my state are concerned about trade barriers between the United States and the European Union (E.U.) regarding high aflatoxin sampling rates.

- a. If confirmed, will you commit to working with the U.S. Trade Representative to negotiate an effective solution to this ongoing non-tariff trade barrier with your E.U. counterparts?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the U.S. Trade Representative on all matters impacting American agriculture, including non-tariff trade barriers like the EU's aflatoxin sampling.

¹⁴ *USDA Equity Commission*, Federal Register (Apr. 22, 2022), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/04/22/2022-08583/usda-equity-commission>; *USDA Equity Commission Presents its Final Report*, USDA (Feb. 27, 2025), <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/radio/weekly-features/2024-02-27/usda-equity-commission-presents-its-final-report>.

- b. Will you commit to keeping my colleagues and me updated on your progress with addressing this issue, including briefings, upon request?

If confirmed, I will be happy to provide status updates upon request.

- c. If confirmed, will you commit to submitting requests for sufficient funding for research to the White House Office of Management and Budget during the annual appropriations process to ensure USDA has the necessary resources to research and address aflatoxin?

While I do not want to get ahead of the President and the Secretary, if confirmed, I commit to working with the Secretary, the Office of Management and Budget, and other interested parties to help craft the Department's budget.

- 10. Georgia is home to MANA, one of our nation's two manufacturers of ready-to-use therapeutic foods (RUTF), which is used to treat the most extreme forms of hunger across the world. This product also supports peanut farmers in my state who grow the main ingredient of RUTF, peanuts, as well as jobs in the rural community in which MANA is located.

- a. If confirmed, how will you work to scale-up RUTF procurement and distribution?

If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about the issue raised in this question.

- 11. The Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP) is a critical part of the farmer safety net that helps protect farmers from the financial consequences of adverse growing and market conditions.¹⁵ In Georgia, federal crop insurance plans like the Hurricane Insurance Protection-Wind Index (HIP-WI) have been important lifelines for producers recovering from Hurricanes Helene¹⁶ and Debby,¹⁷ which caused significant damage to agricultural operations across Georgia. However, I have heard from farmers in my state that the Risk Management Agency's indemnity payment process for HIP-WI, which relies solely on

¹⁵ Stephanie Rosch, *Farm Bill Primer: Federal Crop Insurance Program*, Congressional Research Service (Aug. 26, 2022), <https://www.crs.gov/reports/pdf/IF12201/IF12201.pdf>.

¹⁶ Richard Flourmoy, *Product Management Bulletin-PM-24-067 Hurricane Insurance Protection - Wind Index (HIP-WI) Payment Indicator and Trigger Event Date for Helene 2024*, Risk Management Agency (Oct. 11, 2024), <https://www.rma.usda.gov/policy-procedure/bulletins-memos/product-management-bulletin/2024/pm-24-067-hurricane-insurance>.

¹⁷ *USDA Makes Indemnity Payments to Producers Impacted by Hurricane Debby*, Risk Management Agency (Aug. 23, 2024), <https://www.rma.usda.gov/news-events/news/2024/washington-dc/usda-makes-indemnity-payments-producers-impacted-hurricane>.

data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA),¹⁸ has left some producers out when local data shows they should have received indemnity payments for hurricanes in 2024.

- a. If confirmed, how will you work to maintain and strengthen FCIP's vital public-private partnerships to help ensure that all of Georgia's farmers have access to our nation's farmer safety net?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress, NOAA, and RMA to ensure the best available data is used when making policy decisions.

- b. If confirmed, will you commit to working with Congress, NOAA, and RMA to improve HIP-WI's indemnity payment process so that HIP-WI better meets the needs of our farmers in the wake of hurricanes?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with Congress, NOAA, and RMA to ensure the best available data is used when making policy decisions.

12. Georgia farmers continue to be top users of the H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers (H-2A) program to meet their seasonal labor needs.¹⁹ However, some producers, including controlled environmental agricultural operators, are unable to use this program to meet their year-round labor needs.

- a. If confirmed, how will you commit to work with Congress and the Department of Labor to reform the H-2A program to better support the needs of year-round agricultural operations like controlled environment agriculture operations?

If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Department of Labor to see if administrative changes can be made to better support producers using the H-2A program. However, the purpose of the H-2A program is to provide agricultural labor or services of a temporary or seasonal nature. Changes to statute would be needed for the H-2A program to support the needs of year-round agricultural operations.

13. One of the prominent, unique challenges that Georgia's specialty crop producers face is the import dumping of cheap, foreign-grown fruits and vegetables during the U.S. growing season, which outcompetes domestic specialty crops and harm domestic growers.

¹⁸ *Hurricane Insurance Protection - Wind Index (HIP-WI)*, Risk Management Agency (Jan. 2025), <https://www.rma.usda.gov/about-crop-insurance/highlighted-initiatives-plans/hurricane-insurance-protection-wind-index>.

¹⁹ *Id.* (Chart entitled "U.S. H-2A (temporary agricultural employment of foreign workers) positions certified by State, fiscal years 2005–23").

I am glad that U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) have appointed members to their newly established the Seasonal and Perishable Agricultural Products Advisory Committee to address this issue.

- a. If confirmed, will you commit to continuing the Seasonal and Perishable Agricultural Products Advisory Committee?

I do not want to get ahead of Secretary Rollins or Ambassador Greer; however, if confirmed, I do commit to working with the U.S. Trade Representative on all matters impacting American agriculture.

- b. Will you seriously consider any recommendations of the Seasonal and Perishable Agricultural Products Advisory Committee to support our nation's specialty crop producers?

I do not want to get ahead of Secretary Rollins or Ambassador Greer; however, if confirmed, I do commit to working with the U.S. Trade Representative on all matters impacting American agriculture.

- c. If confirmed, will you work with me and my colleagues, to put effective trade measures in place to help curb these growing import levels and keep our domestic specialty crop farmers in business?

I do not want to get ahead of Secretary Rollins or Ambassador Greer; however, if confirmed, I do commit to working with the U.S. Trade Representative on all matters impacting American agriculture.

- 14. You confirmed in your nomination hearing on April 8, 2025 that you are aware USDA has been sued over claims of discrimination in farm lending programs by minority farmers.

- a. Do you believe that USDA has a history of racial discrimination particularly within its farm lending programs?

Yes, the Department has faced multiple instances of litigation in recent years on the basis of past discrimination.

- b. Were you aware of cases of discrimination or patterns showing lower program participation for certain groups during your previous time at USDA?

The Office of General Counsel handled legal claims regarding alleged discrimination made against the department.

As with any Administration, complaints are received via the Civil Rights, Labor and Employment Law Division within Office of the General Counsel, however, I am unaware of any substantive claims of programmatic discrimination that resulted in litigation during my previous time at USDA.

15. As you know, due to USDA's history of discrimination and more generally a pattern of not reaching particular eligible farmers, Congress has passed laws requiring additional outreach, fee waivers, and higher cost share or payment rates for "underserved farmers." Underserved farmers can include farmers of color, Tribal members, women, veterans, beginning farmers, and small or limited resource farmers.

- a. In your opinion, are these Congressionally mandated activities for underserved farmers "DEI programs"?

The statutory definition of "underserved farmers" can vary based on which program you are referring to; however, the definition can include beginning farmers, veteran farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, or limited resource farmers. Regardless of my opinion, I will follow the law.

- b. If confirmed, will you vigorously defend these programs against challenges by outside groups, e.g., on the basis that these programs violate equal protection laws? If not, why not?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

- c. If confirmed, how will you work to ensure that farmers of color have full and fair access to all existing and future farm lending programs?

If confirmed, I will ensure that every American served by USDA is treated with dignity and respect.

16. USDA APHIS' National Dog Detector Training Center is located in Newnan, GA, and trains dogs to sniff out pests that may be detrimental to American agriculture and our environment. According to reporting, a trainer at the Center, who was a 20-year Air Force Veteran, was fired just 11 days shy of the end of his probationary period.²⁰ I was proud to pass my Beagle Brigade Act last year to formally authorize the Center and ensure it has stable funding if the user fees that fund its' operation ever drop too low.

²⁰ https://www.times-herald.com/news/national-detector-dog-training-center-experiences-federal-cuts/article_b53a10f8-f124-11ef-89cd-f7115b454fc4.html

- a. If confirmed, how will you work to ensure the Center can meet its' goal of protecting "our Nation's food crops, forests, farms, and environment?"²¹

If confirmed, I look forward to working with APHIS to ensure USDA is well equipped to protect American agriculture and natural resources from damaging pests and diseases.

Senator John Fetterman

1. Would it be lawful for USDA to refuse a producer's request to change their records on file with USDA by recording their same-sex marriage for purposes of farm programs?

No, this would be a violation of law.

2. Would it be lawful for USDA to make hiring or promotion decisions or take an adverse employment action based on the sexual orientation or gender identity of an individual?

I will follow the law including the Supreme Court's binding precedent in *Bostock v. Clayton County* (590 U.S. 644 (2020)).

3. There is a growing number of gig workers who work inconsistent hours, receive sporadic paychecks, and have minimal or irregular documentation of their work hours and income. Many gig workers rely on SNAP assistance. Moreover, while many gig workers are able to deduct self-employment expenses (e.g., gas and tolls for Uber drivers) to determine net income for SNAP, there is a significant paperwork burden for an individual working a low-wage job.

- a. If confirmed what is your plan to ensure that state agencies will be able to provide SNAP benefits to gig workers who otherwise meet requirements for SNAP but struggle to prove work hours or show pay stubs because of their atypical work arrangements?

If confirmed, I look forward to briefings on all USDA-FNS actions to date, including what States are doing in a post-pandemic world at the point of eligibility determination.

- b. Do you think that changes to SNAP regulations that restrict the use of stater ABAWD waivers would limit access to SNAP by gig workers who are working enough hours to meet work requirements but who lack the ability to consistently document their hours?

No, because the Department can work with States on documentation expectations.

²¹ <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-protection-quarantine/detector-dogs>

Senator Adam Schiff

1. I understand you were involved in the creation of USDA's Market Facilitation Program under the first Trump Administration to provide relief for American farmers due to tariffs. At her nomination hearing, Secretary Rollins committed to providing equitable support for farmers across the country as USDA Secretary. This is especially important for California, which produces a vast majority of the country's specialty crops. Do you also commit to equitable support for California and for specialty crop producers?

If confirmed, I commit to ensuring specialty crops are considered for future USDA programming when lawful and appropriate.

2. Over the last few months, USDA offices that serve farmers and rural communities throughout the country have faced closure, employee morale has been low, critical programs have been cancelled, and funds have been frozen. Do you commit to preventing further staffing cuts and office closures that harm USDA programs and those that benefit from them?

I do not want to get ahead of the President or the Secretary; however, if confirmed, I do commit to working with the Secretary, the Department, and partners to make sure the agency is carrying out its congressionally mandated activities.

3. USDA Rural Development programs have long been a lifeline for many rural California counties. Since 2012, they've delivered over \$12.6 billion in investments across the state—supporting everything from water infrastructure and housing to business development and health care. Given the ongoing challenges in rural California, including persistent poverty, wildfire threats, and severe housing shortages, will you ensure these rural communities continue to receive support from USDA Rural Development and are not left behind in future funding decisions?

If confirmed, I will work to ensure programs and policies under the purview of the U.S. Department of Agriculture are equally accessible to all communities.

4. California is on the frontlines of increasingly severe and frequent wildfires. The U.S. Forest Service plays a vital role in wildfire prevention, suppression, and post-fire recovery, but its workforce and operational capacity have been stretched thin. Given recent staffing and operational cuts, what actions will you take to ensure that the U.S. Forest Service maintains the staffing levels, equipment, and funding needed to effectively respond to wildfires? How will USDA work with state and local partners to strengthen community resilience and support long-term forest health?

I do not want to get ahead of the Secretary or agency leadership; however, if confirmed, I do commit to ensuring the Forest Service can carry out its mission critical work.

If confirmed, I also commit to working with the Secretary, the agency, state, tribal, and local government partners to make sure the Forest Service is carrying out all activities required by law.

5. Awarded contracts, grants, and agreements in the past few years have supported American farmers in every state to make investments that conserve natural resources, expand their markets, grow nutritious food, and more. While I understand that some of these contracts, grants, and agreements have been unfrozen, many remain frozen, if not outright canceled. Countless producers benefiting from this support already made significant investments for which they are owed reimbursement or continued support. Do you commit to unfreezing all obligated and promised funding so farmers can get the money and support they are owed from USDA?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Nomination Hearing
 April 8, 2025
 Questions for the Record
Mr. Tyler Clarkson

Senator Amy Klobuchar

1. **Disbursement of Funds:** This Administration has paused the disbursement of significant amounts of funds appropriated by Congress. If confirmed, will you commit to implement all USDA programs and administer all funds to USDA as appropriated?

If confirmed, I will follow the law.

2. **Responsiveness to Congress:** If you are confirmed, do you agree to:
 - a. Promptly reply to any request for information, data, or technical assistance from members of this Committee or any duly constituted committee of Congress and provide the requested information?

I will respond promptly and appropriately.

- b. Notify the Committee in advance of any major changes, including but not limited to program pauses or terminations, reprogramming of funds, layoffs, office closures or relocations, or other significant actions affecting offices or programs?

I commit to following applicable law and will work with the Department's Office of Congressional Relations ("OCR") to make appropriate attempt(s) to notify Congress.

- c. Provide to this Committee any reports provided by USDA to the Senate Appropriations Committee or the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee?

I will work with OCR to coordinate and share as appropriate.

- d. Provide regular reports to this Committee showing the Commodity Credit Corporation balance and spending by program?

I will work with the Department's OCR to coordinate and share as appropriate.

3. **Congressional Notification:** If confirmed, do you commit to complying with any Congressional notification requirements under law, including those involving Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and Rural Development field office closures?

I commit to following applicable law and will work with OCR to make appropriate attempt(s) to notify Congress.

4. **Oversight:** The Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Inspectors General play a critical role in providing oversight of the executive branch, regardless of Administration.

- a. Will you commit to responding promptly and thoroughly to GAO and the Inspector General on all oversight requests?

I commit to prompt and thorough responses as appropriate.

5. **Scientific Integrity:**

- a. Do you believe that changes in climate present a threat to American farmers and ranchers? If so, how?

The climate changes, but the precise cause(s) and suitable response(s) remain the subject of debate.

- b. Do you believe that changes in climate are due to human activity?

Humans have the potential to impact the climate, but the extent remains the subject of debate.

- c. Do you believe vaccines are effective tools to control disease and improve human and animal health?

Vaccines are one of several effective tools to respond to human and animal disease.

- d. If confirmed, will you commit to not interfering with scientific research, including the publication and dissemination of scientific research?

I commit to counseling the Department's policy officials to ensure scientific research comports with the law and advances the interests of our farmers and ranchers.

6. **Rule of Law:** At your hearing, you stated that Supreme Court precedent would likely control if an Executive Order were directly opposed to binding Supreme Court precedent. If confirmed, will you comply with all court orders?

Yes.

7. **Congressional Notification:** If confirmed, do you commit to providing prompt notification to the Committee if USDA decides not to enforce any statutory requirement or not to defend a challenge to any statutory requirement?

I will follow applicable law on all notification requirements.

8. **Oversight:** Except for a valid claim of executive privilege, do you believe that there are any other bases to withhold documents or information from Congress? If so, please describe those bases.

I will work closely with the Department's OCR to ensure the Department can provide as much information as appropriate in all instances.

9. **Rule of Law:** If confirmed as General Counsel, you will be asked for your legal opinion on proposed USDA policies and actions, and on occasion, you may believe that a proposed policy or action is not fully supported by law.

- a. What will you do if USDA officials or individuals outside USDA ask you to approve something that you do not believe is supported by federal law?

I will comply with applicable law.

10. Recordkeeping and Freedom of Information Act: The General Counsel has oversight over the Office of Information Affairs, which is responsible for USDA's FOIA and records management program.

- a. Will you commit to ensuring that agency officials, including political appointees, use official devices and platforms for agency communications in a manner that preserves all communications related to government business to comply with Federal recordkeeping laws?

Yes, I will commit to compliance with federal recordkeeping laws.

- b. Will you commit to ensuring that USDA provides timely and accurate responses to all Freedom of Information Act requests?

Yes, I will commit to compliance with federal recordkeeping laws.

Senator Michael Bennet

1. USDA enters into a broad range of legally binding agreements with producers—including contracts for conservation, commodity support, disaster assistance, crop insurance, and loans—that directly affect farm operations, land management, and rural livelihoods across the country. Many Colorado producers have been waiting months for reimbursements on work completed under signed agreements with the USDA, creating

unnecessary financial strain and causing stress, which is taking a toll on their mental health, not to mention their businesses.

- a. Do you believe that the USDA is legally required to live up to the financial commitments that it has made to producers and partners across the country by following through with making timely funding reimbursements and continuing obligations under all signed grant agreements and cooperative agreements?

In all instances, USDA will follow the law.

- b. Do you agree that these contracts must be honored in full, regardless of changes in executive direction?

In all instances, USDA will follow the law.

- c. Can Executive Orders nullify legally binding agreements and contracts?

In all instances, USDA will follow the law.

- d. What role would your office play in protecting the legal rights of producers in these agreements?

If confirmed, my office will counsel policymakers at USDA to follow the law.

- e. USDA can pursue “terminations of convenience.” How do you plan to ensure farmers continue to see the USDA as a reliable partner in these cases?

In instances in which USDA enjoys a right to terminate for convenience, the decision to terminate rests with policymakers.

- 2. As General Counsel, you will play a key role in providing legal guidance on the implementation of the next Farm Bill.

- a. How will you interpret and carry out Congressional intent when the USDA begins implementing this critical law?

The text of the enacted Farm Bill will be decisive in interpreting and carrying out its intent.

- 3. At the hearing, you questioned the use of the Commodity Credit Corporation’s (CCC) authority to create the Partnership for Climate Smart Commodities (PCSC) program.

- a. Were you aware of the clear legal opinion issued by the Government Accountability Office that found that “PCSC is authorized under section 5(e) of the CCC Charter Act and not the Food Security Act”?

GAO's interpretation of a statute can prove helpful in understanding applicable law.

- b. Do you intend to reverse the USDA opinion and restrict the use of section 5(e)?

I intend to review relevant USDA opinion(s) on the use of Sec. 5(e).

4. Regardless of the decision on authority, hundreds of businesses and other entities have binding contracts with the USDA under PCSC and have, in turn, entered into thousands of contracts with individual farmers under the program. In many cases, farmers and the partner organizations have already expended significant resources based on the legally binding promises by USDA for reimbursement.
- a. If confirmed, would you advise USDA to abide by legally binding contracts such as these? If not, under what authority would you break the contracts?

If confirmed, I will counsel policymakers to follow applicable law.

5. During the previous Trump Administration, the USDA relocated two agencies to Kansas City.

If further relocations are pursued, will you commit to full transparency and obtaining legally-required Congressional approval on actions to transfer funding for relocating USDA's agencies?

I commit to following applicable law and will work with the Department's Office of Congressional Relations ("OCR") to make appropriate attempt(s) to notify Congress.

Senator Richard Durbin

1. Do you believe it would be lawful for USDA, its agencies, offices, or employees to deny funding to, withhold benefits from, or administratively investigate a person based on their political beliefs, their political speech, or their filing of a lawsuit against the Federal government?

No.

2. If an Executive Order were directly opposed to Federal statute or binding Supreme Court precedent, would you advise USDA to follow the Executive Order, if confirmed as General Counsel?

I would advise policymakers at USDA to follow applicable law.

3. I understand that the Department has placed on administrative leave probationary as well as other employees.

- a. What are the limits and due process procedures at USDA for placing employees on administrative leave?

The protections and process afforded to employees will depend on several factors, e.g., tenure, rank, and grade. Attention to each relevant factor and to applicable law dictates the protections and/or process afforded to each employee.

4. Employee morale at USDA's Office the General Counsel plummeted during your previous tenure at USDA. In 2020, OGC ranked nearly at the bottom of the list of "Best Places to Work" (408th out of 411 for federal subagency components). The score for effective leadership of OGC and support for diversity also plummeted during that time.

- a. In your opinion, why did employee morale experience such a significant decline under during your previous time at USDA?

During the prior term, the Office of General Counsel ("OGC") leadership found itself in a protracted negotiation with the bargaining unit that covers USDA OGC.

- b. Do you think employee morale is important to an organization's success? If not, why not?

Employee morale is one of several considerations that contributes to an organization's success.

- c. Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently during your previous tenure that you think would have improved employee morale?

No.

- d. If confirmed, what would you do as General Counsel to improve employee morale in USDA's Office of the General Counsel?

If confirmed, I plan to prioritize responsiveness to our client agencies. For OGC attorneys, that means trusting them to deliver timely, accurate, and clear advice. Clear expectations – of the kind just described – help substantially with an organization's morale.

5. The current OGC collective bargaining agreement does not expire until August 1, 2030. At that time the terms of the collective bargaining agreement specify that the agreement shall automatically renew in increments of 1 year, unless either OGC management or the union provides written notice of a desire to renegotiate. During the hearing, you stated

that you appreciated that at the moment, the current OGC collective bargaining agreement is not open for negotiation.

- a. If confirmed, do you commit not to terminate or renegotiate the OGC collective bargaining agreement before August 1, 2030? If not, why not?

I commit to evaluating the current CBA and the extent to which it ensures OGC delivers responsive counsel to our client agencies.

- b. Do you believe that it is important for workers in both the public and private sector to have collective bargaining rights?

It is important that as a client-servicing function OGC offers its client agencies the best possible legal advice. That benchmark will animate considerations related to OGC's CBA.

- c. If confirmed, do you commit to advising the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and other senior leaders at USDA not to terminate or renegotiate existing collective bargaining agreements before such agreement expire? If not, why not?

I commit to advising USDA leadership to follow applicable law on labor matters.

Senator Cory Booker

1. Have you ever discussed any of the discrimination claims against USDA or any of its officials brought by the Wisconsin Institute Law and Liberty, the Pacific Legal Foundation, or America First Legal Foundation with individuals affiliated with these entities?

No.

- a. If so, whom did you talk to at those entities, which claims did you discuss, and what was the nature of those discussions?

N/A

- b. Do you believe that the claims brought by those entities against USDA were meritorious? If so, why?

To the extent these claims relate to ongoing litigation, the U.S. Department of Justice has made clear in court filings whether the U.S. Government views the claims as meritorious.

2. Did anyone in President Trump's transition team or anyone in this Administration, including at the White House, ever ask you about your loyalty to President Trump, your

voting history, or ask for any commitments in accepting this nomination? If so, by whom and what was your response?

I was not asked to make any commitments in accepting this nomination.

3. Do you believe that it would be lawful for USDA to make hiring or rehiring decisions based on either the political affiliation of the individual or based on a stakeholder requesting the hiring or rehiring of that individual?

No.

4. USDA had a moratorium on farm foreclosures and Congress provided USDA with resources to help distressed borrowers during the past few years to keep farmers farming and that cut bankruptcies by more than half. Do you agree that foreclosure should be the last resort and, if confirmed, would you support efforts to help otherwise viable farms through short-term cash flow challenges? If so, how would you use your role to limit farm foreclosures and keep farmers farming?

The Office of General Counsel (“OGC”) works with its client agencies in the context of foreclosures typically only when the client agency has made the decision that no further forbearance is appropriate. At that point, OGC assists with foreclosure proceedings.

Senator Raphael Warnock

1. USDA’s Office of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OSCAR) leads efforts to facilitate the fair and equitable treatment of USDA customers and employees, and it enforces civil rights law.¹ On January 21, 2025, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report on USDA’s efforts to address internal workplace discrimination complaints, which included three recommendations for the Secretary of Agriculture to take to improve OSCAR’s effectiveness and strengthen USDA’s response to internal discrimination complaints.²

- a. If confirmed, will you commit to reading this report and take seriously the recommendations of this report?

Yes.

- b. If confirmed, how will you work with OSCAR and the Secretary of Agriculture to respond to GAO’s recommendations within this report?

¹ *Office of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights*, U.S. Department of Agriculture (Jan. 2025), <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/general-information/staff-offices/office-assistant-secretary-civil-rights>.

² *Equal Employment Opportunity: USDA Could Strengthen Efforts to Address Workplace Discrimination Complaints*, Government Accountability Office (Jan. 21, 2025), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-105804>.

I commit to reviewing the report and working with OASCR on matters related to issues identified in the report that create legal risk for the Department.

2. In March 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act, which included a requirement for USDA to create an Equity Commission, which issued a report in February 2024.³

a. If confirmed, will you commit to reading the Equity Commission's final report?

Yes.

b. If confirmed, will you seriously consider the recommendations of the Equity Commission's report?

Yes.

c. If confirmed, will you work with Secretary Rollins to implement the recommendations of the Equity Commission's report?

I commit to working with Secretary Rollins on implementing her vision for USDA.

3. You confirmed in your nomination hearing on April 8, 2025 that you are aware USDA has been sued over claims of discrimination in farm lending programs by minority farmers.

a. Do you believe that USDA has a history of racial discrimination particularly within its farm lending programs?

USDA has settled no fewer than two major class action lawsuits that conceded a practice of unlawful discrimination.

b. Were you aware of cases of discrimination or patterns showing lower program participation for certain groups during your previous time at USDA?

No.

4. As you know, due to USDA's history of discrimination and more generally a pattern of not reaching particular eligible farmers, Congress has passed laws requiring additional outreach, fee waivers, and higher cost share or payment rates for "underserved farmers." Underserved farmers can include farmers of color, Tribal members, women, veterans,

³ *USDA Equity Commission*, Federal Register (Apr. 22, 2022), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/04/22/2022-08583/usda-equity-commission>; *USDA Equity Commission Presents its Final Report*, USDA (Feb. 27, 2025), <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/radio/weekly-features/2024-02-27/usda-equity-commission-presents-its-final-report>.

beginning farmers, and small or limited resource farmers.

- a. In your opinion, are these Congressionally mandated activities for underserved farmers “DEI programs”?

In all instances, USDA should follow the law.

- b. If confirmed, will you vigorously defend these programs against challenges by outside groups, e.g., on the basis that these programs violate equal protection laws? If not, why not?

In all instances, USDA should follow the law.

- c. If confirmed, how will you work to ensure that farmers of color have full and fair access to all existing and future farm lending programs?

In all instances, USDA should follow the law. That means USDA should administer programs without attention to a program participant’s race.

Senator John Fetterman

1. Organic regulations are an important market tool and provide stability and consistency for organic producers in PA and across the country. Will you commit to working with the National Organic Program to help them publish organic standards that keep U.S. organic agriculture competitive and thriving?

I commit to working closely with the National Organic Program (“NOP”) to identify all applicable legal requirements and to ensure NOP is complying with applicable law.

2. Will you commit to hiring OGC staff with experience and knowledge in organic agriculture and organic regulations?

I commit to treating such experience as valuable in hiring decisions.

3. Pursuant to the president’s “Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity” Executive Order on January 21, 2025, or pursuant to any other relevant Executive Order, do you have plans to investigate or begin litigation against organizations engaged in what the president has referred to as “diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)”, such as organizations that promote opportunities for disadvantaged farmers or farmers from minority populations?

I have no preconceived plans to investigate or litigate against such entities.

- a. Have you talked to senior administration officials about plans to investigate or to begin litigation against organizations engaged in what the president has referred to as “diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)”, such as organizations that promote opportunities for disadvantaged farmers or farmers from minority populations?

I have not had any such conversations.

Senator Adam Schiff

1. USDA Rural Development programs have long been a lifeline for many rural California counties. Since 2012, they’ve delivered over \$12.6 billion in investments across the state—supporting everything from water infrastructure and housing to business development and health care. Given the ongoing challenges in rural California, including persistent poverty, wildfire threats, and severe housing shortages, will you ensure these rural communities continue to receive support from USDA Rural Development and are not left behind in future funding decisions?

I commit to ensuring USDA Rural Development implements its programs in accordance with law.

2. California is on the frontlines of increasingly severe and frequent wildfires. The U.S. Forest Service plays a vital role in wildfire prevention, suppression, and post-fire recovery, but its workforce and operational capacity have been stretched thin. Given recent staffing and operational cuts, what actions will you take to ensure that the U.S. Forest Service maintains the staffing levels, equipment, and funding needed to effectively respond to wildfires? How will USDA work with state and local partners to strengthen community resilience and support long-term forest health?

I commit to ensuring USDA Forest Service is advised of all legal flexibilities and authorities to respond to wildfires, including work with state and local partners as appropriate.

3. Awarded contracts, grants, and agreements in the past few years have supported American farmers in every state to make investments that conserve natural resources, expand their markets, grow nutritious food, and more. While I understand that some of these contracts, grants, and agreements have been unfrozen, many remain frozen, if not outright canceled. Countless producers benefiting from this support already made significant investments for which they are owed reimbursement or continued support. Do you commit to unfreezing all obligated and promised funding so farmers can get the money and support they are owed from USDA?

I will counsel officials at USDA in all instances to comply with applicable law.