

**Statement by
Jeffrey Prieto
Nominee for General Counsel, US Department of Agriculture
Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture
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Good morning. Greetings Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Stabenow and other distinguished members of the Committee. I thank you all for your willingness to hold this hearing. It is an honor and a privilege to appear before you as President Obama's nominee for the General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture. I am humbled by the trust this nomination represents, and I am grateful to President Obama and Secretary Vilsack for providing me this opportunity. Should I have the privilege of being confirmed, I look forward to continuing to serve the American public.

I am also grateful for a wonderful family who has supported my endeavors. My wife, Sheryl, and my oldest son, Daniel, are with me today. Matthew, my youngest son, just started his summer job this week and is unable to join us. I want to publicly thank my wife for her support, understanding, and patience throughout my career. I could not have done what I have done without her. I am also joined by my mother, sister, and our Rector. I am so grateful to them for their prayers and love. Members of my family and my community have sacrificed much so that I could have opportunities. I have attempted throughout my career to repay this debt by serving the public.

I am a product of my family's history in this country. My life is the result of their examples and sacrifices. I especially think today of my three uncles who died serving this country during World War II, and my other family members who have also served this country in the military, including a cousin who received a Distinguished Flying Cross for his service in Vietnam and another who served in the special forces in Afghanistan. I am inspired by their sacrifice.

I understand that inspiration must be coupled with hard work. I learned about hard work from my grandfather, Leo Alvarez, who was employed by a lemon packinghouse in Santa Paula, California, for over fifty years. It was his dream that his grandchildren would be the first in our family to graduate from college. He and my grandmother used what they earned to benefit our family, both here and in Mexico. Their love and generosity changed many lives, including mine.

Finally, inspiration and hard work must have a purpose. In my case, my career, as an urban planner, White House Fellow, and Department of Justice attorney, has been dedicated to public service. I learned how inspiration, hard work, and service can come together from my mother. She never fulfilled her dream of graduating from college, but she worked so that her children could take advantage of the opportunities provided. She was the primary earner for our family. She worked a variety of jobs as we grew up, including working a split shift schedule as a secretary at the local community college so she could be home when her children left for and returned from school. She never lost hope in me, even during those time when there was little room for hope.

If confirmed, serving as General Counsel would be the apex of 15 years of public service at the Department of Justice and USDA. The honor of serving as USDA's chief legal officer will allow me to continue to do what I have done throughout my legal career, serve the American people. It

will also allow me to contribute the skills and experiences I have acquired as an attorney responsible for a broad portfolio of public policy issues and complex civil litigation, including some of the most important matters brought on behalf of the American public.

I look forward to serving America's farmers, ranchers and rural communities because they are not only essential contributors to our Nation's economy but also among the most challenged segments of American society. Both my parents were raised in Santa Paula, the "Citrus Capital of the World." I understand and appreciate the challenges facing our country's farmers and ranchers, rural communities and agribusinesses.

I have been privileged as a Federal Government attorney to work on some of the most challenging issues in my field. My previous positions have prepared me to serve as the General Counsel. My Federal Government experience allows me to understand the challenges facing Federal Agencies. If confirmed, I am committed to using my experience and skills to ensure that legal counsel and services are provided in an effective manner. Whether it relates to nutrition assistance programs, rural loans programs, access to broadband, housing, and energy in rural communities, natural resources management, or biotechnology, I look forward to continuing to work with what I consider some of the finest attorneys and professional staff in the country to provide USDA leaders legal advice in a professional, efficient, and expeditious manner.

Finally, should you honor me by recommending me and should the Senate confirm me, I will do everything in my power to execute the duties of the General Counsel. I intend to execute my duties with the highest level of integrity, skill, and professionalism, so as to earn your trust and respect. I am committed to working with the leadership of USDA, and Congress, to further the best interests of all Americans.

Again, thank you very much for holding this hearing to consider my candidacy. I am grateful for your time and glad to answer the Committee's questions.