

**NOMINATION OF BRIAN T. BAENIG,
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,
TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF
AGRICULTURE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
**COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
NUTRITION AND FORESTRY**
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

—————
JULY 28, 2011
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**NOMINATION OF BRIAN T. BAENIG,
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,
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AGRICULTURE**

Thursday, July 28, 2011

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY,
Washington, DC

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m., in Room G-50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman of the committee, presiding.

Present or submitting a statement: Senators Stabenow, Leahy, Roberts, Lugar, and Thune.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DEBBIE STABENOW, U.S. SENATOR
FROM THE STATE OF MICHIGAN, CHAIRWOMAN, COM-
MITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY**

Chairwoman STABENOW. Well, good morning. The Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry will now come to order.

Today, the committee, as first order of business, is going to consider the nomination of Brian Baenig to serve as Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations at USDA. Welcome. We are so pleased that you are here. Congratulations on your nomination, Mr. Baenig. We extend a warm welcome to you and your family and friends, including, I understand, your mom is here, Linda Baenig, and I am sure she is very, very proud of you, and I am sure all of your family and friends are, as well.

I know I speak for all the members of the committee when we say that we take our obligation to advise and consent very seriously. We look forward to your remarks and the opportunity to exercise our constitutional duties.

As Mr. Baenig well knows from his years of service in the Senate, the Department of Agriculture and this committee have an important and special relationship. The position of Assistant Secretary for the Office of Congressional Relations is very important because, if confirmed, you will be the key contact of this committee as we oversee policy and program implementation that is critical for agriculture, for jobs, and for rural America.

Mr. Baenig's nomination comes at a very important time, as this committee is beginning its farm bill process. The staff at USDA will be an indispensable resource for us as we move forward. They are the boots on the ground, implementing the programs that we

have created and will create, so they are able to provide valuable feedback on performance.

The Assistant Secretary of Congressional Relations manages these lines of communication, facilitating the timely exchange of information. An open and honest relationship between the Assistant Secretary and those of us who are on the Hill is absolutely essential.

Mr. Baenig has spent the majority of his career here in the Senate, including some time as a staff member of this committee, so we welcome you back. He is very familiar with the way this body works and the day-to-day challenges we face. I hope and trust that, if confirmed, Mr. Baenig will remember his time here fondly and be a straightforward and sincere voice at the USDA.

I would like to submit two letters of support for Mr. Baenig's nomination. The first is from over 20 different agriculture industries and the second is from the Dairy Farmers of America. If there are no objections, the letters will be inserted into the record.

[The letters can be found on pages 20 and 21 in the appendix.]

Chairwoman STABENOW. And now I would like to turn for a moment to Senator Leahy, who would like to add some words at the beginning of our session. Senator Leahy.

STATEMENT OF HON. PATRICK J. LEAHY, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF VERMONT

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, and thank you, Senator Lugar. Madam Chairwoman, being here with two excellent Chairs of this committee, yourself and Senator Lugar, the three of us have had the honor of chairing this committee and we all know the nominee well. I do not think the President or Secretary Vilsack could have selected a more qualified and practiced professional to help lead the Department of Agriculture's Office of Congressional Relations than Brian.

I know how important it is—I will put my whole statement in the record, but how important it is to keep the lines of communication open. He understands this as well as anybody who could ever be in that position. He worked most recently as Deputy Staff Director on this committee. He has earned the respect of members from both parties and from all regions of the country, but what is very important in this area, from all segments of the agriculture community and the nutrition community and the environmental community and many others.

Brian, it was an honor to have you on my staff. I always wondered about somebody who might have a B.S. in political science from St. Michael's College, but then I was reminded that is exactly the degree I got from St. Michael's College—

[Laughter.]

Senator LEAHY. —so I said, well, it worked before. Let us see if it might work again.

[Laughter.]

Senator LEAHY. I know your mother, Linda, is here, and, as the Chairwoman mentioned, how proud she must be, and I know how proud your father would have been had he been able to be here and see this.

You spent on my staff six years, Senior Advisor on agriculture, energy, conservation issues. You helped Vermont dairy farmers find consensus across the nationwide industry in which consensus is like transporting bullfrogs in a wheelbarrow and increase support for funding for conservation and forestry programs, fighting invasive species, like the lamprey that invaded Lake Champlain. You have helped rural communities get clean water, broadband services. You know, these are amazing things when you stop to think what you have done and the people you have worked with, three different members of this committee, including our late friend Paul Wellstone, and your in-depth knowledge is extremely important.

So, Madam Chairwoman, as I mentioned, I have to go to a markup in another committee I serve on, Judiciary, although I have been told they will not start until I get there. But I just want to be here to say I am so pleased that you and Senator Lugar, and, actually, if Senator Roberts comes here, we are going to have a number of Chairs and former Chairs.

Brian, I told you last night when we met privately in my hide-away office how proud I am of you, and I just want to reiterate it publicly. I have always been proud of you and I am glad that you are willing to take on this job.

[The prepared statement of Senator Leahy can be found on page 14 in the appendix.]

Chairwoman STABENOW. Well, thank you very much, Senator Leahy.

I know that Senator Roberts will be joining us shortly and we will certainly turn to him when he arrives.

Senator Lugar, you are welcome to make any comments. If not, we will proceed.

Senator LUGAR. I will withhold.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much, and I want to thank both Senator Leahy and Senator Lugar, who are very distinguished former Chairs of this committee. I am very, very fortunate to have a committee with so much experience, including a number of former Chairs. We are temporarily in this space. I have indicated to both of them, we will feel at home when their portraits are up on the wall.

[Laughter.]

Chairwoman STABENOW. So we will look forward to making that happen.

But, Mr. Baenig, I have two things that I now need to do. First is to administer an oath that we have for all of the nominees, if you would like to stand and raise your right hand.

Do you swear that the testimony you are about to present is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. BAENIG. Yes.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much.

And, secondly, do you agree that, if confirmed, you will appear before any duly constituted committee of Congress, if asked to appear?

Mr. BAENIG. Yes.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much.

And again, welcome, and we would ask you to proceed with your testimony. As you know, we are happy to take any written testimony and we would ask that your verbal testimony be kept to five minutes. Thank you.

TESTIMONY OF BRIAN T. BAENIG, OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, NOMINATED TO BE AN ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Mr. BAENIG. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Roberts, former Chairman Senator Lugar, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as a nominee for Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations at the Department of Agriculture.

Chairman Leahy, thank you for that kind introduction. When you hired me nearly ten years ago, I could have never imagined sitting on this side of the table. Your leadership, your guidance, your friendship have been very important to me in my personal life and my professional career, so thank you very much.

Madam Chairwoman, members of the committee, it is a great honor to be nominated by President Obama to serve in this position, and if confirmed, you have my commitment that I will work diligently to live up to the high standards and expectations that this committee has set and the administration has set. I commit to always being responsive to all of your questions and concerns.

Madam Chairwoman, as you recognized, I have spent my career in this institution and I treasure it and I hold dear especially the long bipartisan traditions of this committee. As you know, I have worked for Senators Wellstone, Leahy, and most recently, Senator Lincoln on this committee. I have had the honor to work for a diverse set of Senators who all had the same passion—the same bipartisan passion—for supporting America’s farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. I will bring that same commitment to work each day if I am confirmed for this position.

Most recently, I have worked as a staff member of this committee, and I feel strongly that straightforward communication between the Department of Agriculture and the Congress is critical to the legislative process and essential to the position for which I am being considered today. While your positions on specific issues may not always match those of the Secretary or the President, I will always be responsive to your requests and respectful of your concerns and questions. And while I may not always have the answers you are looking for immediately, I will commit to each and every one of you to find the answers and always be fair, honest, and straightforward with you and your staff.

I am keenly aware of the current budget situation that we all face and the tremendous obstacles that it presents to this committee and our country. But I believe we must always remember that America’s farmers and ranchers and our agriculture sector are responsible in no small way for the health and strength of this great nation. Not only does American agriculture produce the highest and most abundant quality of food, feed, fiber, and fuel at affordable prices, but American producers preserve our environment, sustain our rural communities, and help drive our national economy.

Along with Secretary Vilsack, I am committed to working with this committee and the House committee to ensure that the next farm bill retains a strong and effective safety net for all of American agriculture. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with each of you and your staff to make all the needed resources available during this process. I believe that we share the goal of ensuring that American agriculture and our rural communities remain productive and competitive, and working together, I am confident we can accomplish that goal, as this committee always has, in a bipartisan fashion.

The Department of Agriculture has an aggressive agenda to serve our nation's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. Secretary Vilsack and the Department is focused on delivering results that create jobs, promote innovation in our rural communities. If confirmed, I look forward to helping him with this important work.

Finally, Madam Chairwoman, if you would grant me a moment, I would like to recognize just a few people who are here today, Nancy Smetanka, Jayne Visser, and Dirk Visser. Thank you today for your support and always.

To my mother, Linda Baenig, thank you for your love and guidance.

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Roberts, former Chairman Lugar, and the rest of the members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I want to express my gratitude to President Obama, to Secretary Vilsack, for the confidence in me to take on this important responsibility. If I have the honor of being supported by this committee and confirmed by the

United States Senate, I look forward to building a strong working relationship with each and every one of you.

Again, thank you for the opportunity. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Baenig can be found on page 16 in the appendix.]

Chairwoman STABENOW. Well, thank you very much.

Mr. Baenig, as Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, you and your staff will serve as key conduits between the USDA and the Congress, and it will be your job, of course, to maintain open communication, transparency, and this is particularly important as we go into writing of the farm bill, which is the critical responsibility of this committee. How do you plan to enhance the USDA's relationship with Congress and what role will you play as Assistant Secretary in facilitating the next farm bill?

Mr. BAENIG. Madam Chairwoman, thank you for that question. As you recognized, I have spent some time here and understand the importance of this role in providing timely communication, advance notice when appropriate and possible, and always providing the technical resources needed during the farm bill drafting process. I remember the long nights and the many weekends that you spent over the course of a two-year period in writing the 2008 farm bill and I strongly feel the USDA needs to be a partner in that effort to always provide the technical resources and the guidance that this committee seeks.

So, if confirmed for this position, you have my commitment to provide what you need and to provide the answers to your questions and effectively communicate the administration's positions.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you. When we talk about writing the farm bill, this is going to be a challenging time, as we all know, and we are very much focused on how we can do things better, how we can consolidate, streamline from the standpoint of our farmers, how we can stretch dollars farther. That is going to be a very important part of what we are doing, and it is going to be vital that the Assistant Secretary is proficient in navigating all the various programs within the Department because it is a large, complex, important agency.

I wonder if you might speak to what experience you have had specifically that have familiarized yourself with the various agencies within the USDA. How has the experience of working on past farm bills prepared you for engaging in this farm bill process, which we all know is going to take everybody working together and is going to be very challenging for us?

Mr. BAENIG. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. You are correct. This is—clearly, the budget environment is going to make this farm bill as difficult as any in the past. I do want to just take the opportunity to recognize that agriculture, as a sector, has already made some significant contributions to the deficit reduction last year, with the significant reduction in the Crop Insurance Program. I think that is important to note, and I know you have and other members of this committee have, also.

In terms of navigating the Department, it is a large institution, 17 agencies, seven mission areas. I have spent the last three months getting to know each and every one of those mission area heads. During my time here, I had direct communication with the agency staff. So I feel like, given my time here, I have a firm grasp on where the Department is.

Again, I think it is going to be essential as we look to the farm bill to make sure that this committee has the right people available, and I think that is important. I think it is important to make career staff available to this committee who have the technical resources and knowledge to help you in the drafting process.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you. And then, finally, we are talking a lot about accountability because we have to make right decisions, and as I said, stretch dollars as far as possible and bring accountability. We are going to be asked to do more with less, as we all know. Could you speak a little bit about how you, in your role, can help us carry out the oversight responsibilities, ensuring accountability within USDA, and any challenges that you would foresee in that process.

Mr. BAENIG. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. As you know, Secretary Vilsack has instituted an aggressive examination of the Department, looking at ways to create new efficiencies, and I look forward to the opportunity to support him in that role and communicate that effectively with you.

He has also—Secretary Vilsack, in terms of accountability, has also made aggressive efforts in the area of civil rights, and if confirmed to this position, I look forward to helping him implement

many of the recommendations the Department has received from an independent audit.

In addition, I think we need to be cognizant of doing more with less in these times of budget constraints. I look forward to providing all that information to the committee as the Department makes its next steps.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much.

Senator LUGAR.

Senator LUGAR. Well, thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Mr. Baenig, this is just an off-the-top-of-the-head suggestion, but I ask it because you are knowledgeable about this committee as well as the Department. I have found that I find much more that is occurring in the Department of Agriculture through commercial newsletters, some that I take because as a corn and soybean farmer, I am interested in the market every day, so this is very informative. At the same time, usually the letters go on to point out what is happening in the Department, what Secretary Vilsack really thinks about things, or the various other people.

Now, your job, as you have expressed—and we have all been talking about—is to convey information back and forth to the committee from the Department and likewise our views. I have often wondered if, in fact, the person in your position composed a newsletter, maybe not each day, but every third or fourth day, which really gave a pretty good idea of what is on the mind of the Secretary, what new initiatives he has or things that he believes we ought to be informed about. Simply so that this information is shared with all the members of the committee and our staffs. That would probably be true of our counterparts in the House of Representatives, likewise.

It would seem to me that we would be on the same page more likely, or know our disagreements early on, and then have opportunities for correspondence, or with you as our emissary, to get the word back. This looks good or it does not look so good, or, in fact, we have delight that the Department is doing a lot of things affirmatively. I am one who admires what Secretary Vilsack has been achieving, and he has many chores that he cannot really express to us day by day.

But I just simply take advantage of this hearing to throw out that suggestion. If, in fact, such a piece of paper, or maybe two or three pages or what have you, would come with some regularity, I would be an avid reader and, likewise, would have, I think, a better idea, honestly, of what is going on in the Department than I might be receiving through the commercial agricultural newsletters that I am reading. Do you have any initial reaction to that idea?

Mr. BAENIG. Well, Senator Lugar, I think it is an excellent suggestion. I think the more we can do in terms of paper communication and face-to-face meetings with the committee or the committee staff, I think it is an excellent suggestion, and if confirmed, I would be happy to commit to see if we can get that done on a regular basis. I think it is an excellent way to let the committee know what the various 17 agencies are doing on a daily basis. I think it would be extremely helpful.

Senator LUGAR. Likewise, to the extent that you have this information before any of the rest of us—this is a very dynamic period

in American agriculture in terms of land values, quite apart from crop prices. And there is a change in many States of the income status of farmers which is very encouraging. It really has not been seen during many of the years in which we have been deliberating in this committee. Just to have those facts, and likewise, how this is affecting the people to whom we are exporting around the globe, how our crop prices are affecting both their demand as well as some of the constraints.

We have a feeling, in other words that even as we talk about our farm bill, we are in the midst, if not of a world food crisis, something approaching that, in which the supplies of food throughout this earth and the number of people who are enhancing their diets plus maybe the increasing number of people, is putting strains on this, and that not just Arab Spring, with young people out in the square, but back in the Hustings where small children, elderly people, and what have you are in severe need. This is likely to persist for some time.

So some better knowledge on the part of our committee, our staff, day by day—we can pick up some of this in the regular press, and I do not fault that coverage worldwide. But there may be some perspectives from the Department standpoint of how the Secretary or others view what our responsibility ought to be so that our farm bill debate is not purely a parochial affair, but one that really encompasses the world in which we live and the interaction of our exports or lack of that with other countries.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Well, thank you very much, Senator Lugar.

I am going to turn this over to my friend and Ranking Member, Senator Roberts, for any both opening comments you would like to make as well as questions. We say good morning.

**HON. PAT ROBERTS, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF
KANSAS**

Senator ROBERTS. Good morning, Madam Chairwoman, and thank you for holding this hearing. I think I am going to submit my opening comments for the record in the interest of time.

If you could talk to the D.C. patrolman who evidently gave somebody a ticket in the tunnel on the way to the Capitol, it would be very helpful. I know you have a lot of influence there.

[Laughter.]

Chairwoman STABENOW. I wonder if the Assistant Secretary would have any control over this. It might help his confirmation.

Senator ROBERTS. It was not by the USDA building at all—

[Laughter.]

Senator ROBERTS. —but at any rate, I do not understand that. That is beside the point. At any rate, I think I will just make my statement part of the record and we can proceed.

[The prepared statement of Senator Roberts can be found on page 12 in the appendix.]

Chairwoman STABENOW. And we have gone through our questions.

Senator ROBERTS. Oh, I see. Well, I think that as I go over the questions here that staff has outlined for me, they are very repet-

itive of the questions that we had. We had a very good visit yesterday, and I think more especially with the experience that he has had with two members, one of which I am extremely fond of, and we talked about that, and then we talked about what would happen when we get into a tough situation and how we would work that out, more especially his relationship with other agencies, EPA, et cetera, et cetera. So I think I am going to simply have these submitted for the record.

At the same time, he answered all the questions to my satisfaction, so thank you for coming in this morning.

Mr. BAENIG. Thank you, Ranking Member.

Chairwoman STABENOW. All right. Well, let me say again, congratulations on being nominated. In my judgment, you have proved to be a thoughtful, competent candidate for this position and I look forward to supporting you for this position. I think the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations for the USDA is a position very, very important to our committee, very important to our success as we move forward in working with the Department in tackling and writing a farm bill that works for everyone.

We know we have a difficult challenge coming up, but we know with your help, we will be able to get this done. And so let me again thank you for being here.

Mr. BAENIG. Thank you very much.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you. And I would ask our first panel for our specialty crop portion of the meeting to come forward.

Senator ROBERTS. Madam Chairman, if I could—

Chairwoman STABENOW. Yes.

Senator ROBERTS. If I could be recognized just for a moment, I would like to take a few moments at this particular time to wander, if you will, or get into another pasture from regular order to recognize a long-term staffer that we have had here—

Chairwoman STABENOW. Yes, please.

Senator ROBERTS. —and public servant that will be retiring as of Friday.

August 5 will be Dave Johnson's last day, unfortunately—fortunately for him, perhaps, but unfortunately for us—as a Republican staffer on the Senate

Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. It will also be the end of a 23-year career in public service, most of that right here on this committee.

Dave has served me as Ranking Member since March. He came on board and helped us get going and running, organized. He previously served as both the Chief Republican Counsel and Deputy Staff Director of this committee. His service includes working for Chairman Lugar from 1987 to 1991, again from 1994 to 2003. He then served Chairman Cochran from 2003 to 2005, and then finally Chairman Chambliss from 2005 to 2007. That is a lot of chairmen. From 2007 to 2008, he served then-Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns as Deputy Chief of Staff at the Department. He then moved to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, where he served until we convinced him to come back and help us get up and running this past spring.

Madam Chairwoman, Dave's record speaks for itself, but I am not sure some understand just how valuable his service has been

to this committee and agriculture and nutrition policy. Anybody that knows Dave can tell you his first love has been nutrition policy. He has worked on numerous child nutrition bills and the nutrition title in no less than four farm bills. I also know that if you sit down and visit with him, he would probably tell you that one of his proudest moments was the work he did on the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, for which a lot of people take credit, but Dave should, as well.

He has been a straight shooter. He gives you the answers you need to hear. But one of his greatest strengths is reminding you of the things you have not considered and need to think about, the law of unintended effects. He has been a tremendous mentor to young staff on both sides of the aisle. He was often the first stop many of them made when looking for advice on how to learn the ropes of the committee.

Finally, Dave's attention to detail and proofing proposed legislation is absolutely legendary. If you are scrubbing a bill and making sure it is done right, he is the set of eyes that you want on it. He is the scrubber. As a member of my staff, I was once told by a former member of the Senate Parliamentarian's Office that a farm bill David helped write and scrub was among the best written bills we have ever seen come through the Senate.

Madam Chairwoman, that pretty well sums it up in regards to Dave's service to this committee. Dave, as a former bucket-toter myself—staffer—thank you for your years of service to our country, the Senate, the members of this committee, and our constituents. You have been a true public servant. We all wish you only the best as you head home to Indiana. Job well done.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Well, thank you very much, Senator Roberts, and we congratulate Dave and we thank him, and I think he deserves a round of applause.

[Applause.]

Senator ROBERTS. Thanks.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Well, thank you so much for those comments. You know, it is important to remember, even in the context of challenging, rough and tumble times that we are in right now, that we have wonderful staff that serve us in the Department and both sides of the aisle who have come for the right reasons, who care deeply about our country, who care deeply about agriculture and nutrition, families, getting this right, people who work with us every day that I think we do not say thank you enough to, who are the reason that we are able to move forward and get things done, because we have smart people with us that care, and that is one of the reasons I am very confident we will be able to proceed with the farm bill, and as we have in the Agriculture Committee over and over again showed that folks can work together and get things done. I know that that is what we are committed to doing, so thank you very much, Senator Roberts.

[Whereupon, at 10:07 a.m., the committee proceeded to other business.]

A P P E N D I X

JULY 28, 2011

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Nomination Hearing for Brian Baenig
Statement and Questions for the record
Brian Baenig
July 28, 2011

Senator Pat Roberts

Statement for the Record:

Chairwoman Stabenow, I appreciate your calling this hearing today to consider the nomination of Mr. Brian Baenig to be the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations at USDA.

Brian is familiar to all of us on this committee. Like me, he is a former bucket "tote-er." I started as a staffer to some great members of the Kansas delegation in former Senator Frank Carlson and Rep. Keith Sebelius. Brian carried a policy baton for former Senators Wellstone and Lincoln and the other "Pat" serving this committee Mr. Leahy.

The position for which President Obama has nominated him will benefit from Brian's understanding of Senate procedure and the history of this committee.

Agriculture is blest with a history of bipartisanship, cooperation and compromise for the good of our farmers, ranchers, growers and consumers.

There's no denying that we've had our sheep and cattle wars in the past and that we will have additional "dust-ups" in the future. But through open communication and a mutual respect, we'll make it through the tough times...like we have before.

As Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, your work will be critical in keeping those lines of communication open between us on the Hill and you folks on Jefferson Avenue.

Balancing the needs and demands of both the House and Senate Ag Committees will be tough. -- My only advice is to return our calls first.

Congratulations and we look forward to working with you.

Thank you Madame Chairwoman.

Senator Saxby Chambliss
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
July 28, 2011
Opportunities for Specialty Crops and Organics in the Farm Bill

Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Roberts, thank you for holding this important hearing to consider the nomination of Brian Baenig for Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

I know that you all will agree with me that it is vital that we have good leadership in place at the Department. As we move towards the next farm bill, it will be critical that the Office of Congressional Relations maintains a close working relationship with this committee.

I have had the pleasure of working with Brian during his time serving as the Deputy Staff Director under Chairman Lincoln. In that position, he gained significant experience as he managed a committee staff and worked on critical policy issues. The experience that he has gained over the years while working here on the Hill will be invaluable to the Office of Congressional Relations.

Again, thank you Chairwoman Stabenow for holding this hearing, and I look forward to a swift confirmation process for Brian.

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy
Senate Agriculture Committee Hearing
On the Nomination of Brian Baenig
To be Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations
U.S. Department of Agriculture**

July 28, 2011

Madame Chairwoman, thank you for the opportunity to make a few remarks about someone who really needs no introduction to this Committee, Brian Baenig. President Obama and Secretary Vilsack could not have selected a more qualified and practiced professional to help lead the Department of Agriculture's Office of Congressional Relations than Brian, and I am pleased to be able to offer a few observations in support of his nomination.

We rely on the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations to keep the lines of communication open and to supply us with the information we need for crafting legislation and responding to the concerns of the people we serve. Brian is a very strong nominee for this position.

Working most recently as the Deputy Staff Director on this Committee, Brian has earned the respect of members from both parties from every region, as well as the respect of agricultural producers, the nutrition community, environmentalists and many others.

On a personal note, I would like to say to Brian that it was an honor to have you as a member of my staff. I am thrilled to see your mother Linda here to enjoy this day with you, and I know that your father would be so proud to see you here today.

As many members of this Committee know, Brian worked on my staff for six years. During that time he was my senior advisor on agriculture, energy and conservation issues, and his work spanned the spectrum of issues that come before this Committee. The projects he worked on ranged from helping Vermont dairy farmers find consensus across a nationwide industry in which consensus building is a lot like trying to carry frogs in a wheelbarrow, to increasing support and funding for conservation and forestry programs, to fighting invasive species like the lamprey that have invaded Lake Champlain, and helping to ensure more rural communities have access to both clean water and broadband services.

Without fail Brian provided sound, timely and always balanced analysis of vital and complex agriculture issues on which I relied as we developed farm bills, child nutrition bills, countless appropriations bills and many other measures. As the Deputy Staff Director on this Committee under Senator Lincoln, he gained an even broader knowledge of the Department of Agriculture and its varied missions. Brian has actually worked for

three different members of this Committee, and during his first three years here in the Senate he worked for our late beloved colleague, and a true friend of the family farmer, Senator Paul Wellstone, who was always fighting for his constituents and farms, and whom we lost far too early.

Brian's professional accomplishments and in-depth knowledge of Congress is matched by his passion for producers, consumers, and America's rural communities. His resume is impressive, and I would like to point out that it has something in common with mine, as we are both graduates of Saint Michael's College in beautiful Colchester, Vermont.

Brian understands the need for a strong safety net for our agriculture producers, whether they are dairy farmers in Vermont, corn farmers in Michigan or wheat farmers in Kansas. Brian will be a tireless advocate to ensure agriculture remains a vibrant part of America's economy.

His experiences here in the Senate will serve as an invaluable asset to this Committee as we begin to debate the farm bill and turn to USDA for input, answers and feedback as we debate various policy options.

I know that Brian will draw on his many years of experience here in the Senate to help keep the lines of communication open to supply all of us with the information we need and to also respond to our concerns for the people each of us serve.

The next farm bill will pose many challenges for all of us, and I am confident that the Department and this Committee will be well served if Brian is confirmed by the Senate to fulfill this critical role, and I urge my colleagues to support this nomination.

Also Madame Chairwoman, I am so sorry that I will not be able to stay for the Specialty Crops and Organics hearing that will follow this. I know the witnesses have traveled a long way to come here today and have all submitted some very thoughtful testimony for the record. This is an issue we care a lot about up in Vermont, and a reason why I wrote and fought for the Organic Farm Bill in 1990 when I was Chairman of this committee. I am unfortunately not going to be able to stay for the hearing as I am scheduled to chair the weekly Judiciary Committee business meeting which begins upstairs momentarily.

TESTIMONY OF BRIAN T. BAENIG**SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY****THURSDAY, JULY 28, 2011**

Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Roberts, and Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as the nominee for Assistant Secretary of Congressional Relations at the United States Department of Agriculture. Chairman Leahy, thank you for that kind introduction. When you hired me nearly 10 years ago, I could have never imagined sitting on this side of the table. Your leadership, guidance and friendship have been invaluable to my personal and professional life.

Madam Chairwoman, Members of the Committee, it is a great honor to be nominated by President Obama to serve as Assistant Secretary of Congressional Relations. It is a true privilege to be asked to serve in this role. Should I be confirmed, you have my commitment that I will work diligently to live up to the high standards and expectations that the Administration and this Committee have set, and to always be receptive to all of your requests and concerns.

I treasure the Congress as an institution and I hold dear the long bipartisan tradition of this Committee. As you know, I have worked for Senators Wellstone, Leahy and Lincoln. I have been honored to work for a diverse group of Senators who all had the same bipartisan passion for supporting America's farmers and ranchers and rural communities. I will bring that same passion and commitment to my work each day if I am confirmed for this position.

Having served on this Committee as a staff member, I feel strongly that straightforward communication between the Department of Agriculture and Congress is critical to the legislative process and essential to the position for which I am being considered today. While your positions on specific issues may not always match those of the Secretary or the President, I will always be responsive to your requests and respectful of your concerns and questions. And, while I may not always have the answers you are looking for immediately, I commit to find the answers and always to be fair, honest, and straightforward with you and your staff.

I am keenly aware of the current budget situation that we all face, and the tremendous obstacles that this presents. Yet I believe we must always remember that America's farmers and ranchers and our agriculture sector are responsible in no small way for the health and strength of this great nation. Not only does American agriculture produce the highest and most abundant quality of food, feed, fiber, and fuel at affordable prices, but American producers preserve our environment, sustain our rural communities and help drive our national economy.

Along with Secretary Vilsack, I am committed to working with this Committee to ensure that the next farm bill retains a strong and effective safety net for all of American agriculture. If confirmed, I pledge to work closely with each of you, and your staff, to make all needed resources available to you during this process. I believe that we share the goal of ensuring that American agriculture and our rural communities remain productive and competitive and working

together I am confident we can accomplish that goal, as this Committee always has, in a strong bipartisan manner.

The Department of Agriculture has an aggressive agenda to serve our Nation's farmers, ranchers and rural communities. The Department is focused on delivering results that create jobs and promote innovation in our rural communities. If confirmed, I look forward to helping with this important work. In addition, I want to emphasize my commitment to two major priorities of the Department. First I pledge to work closely with this Committee to implement the three pending bilateral trade agreements. Exports are critical for the future of American agriculture. In addition I want to pledge my active support for civil rights at the Department. Secretary Vilsack has been a leader in making this a priority at USDA, and I share his strong commitment to civil rights. If confirmed, I pledge to do all that I can to ensure that discrimination, in any form, is not tolerated.

Finally if you would grant me a moment I would like to recognize a few people who have joined us today and are very special to me. Nancy Smetanka, Jayne Visser and Dirk Visser, thank you for your support today and always. To my mother, Linda Baenig, thank you for your love and guidance.

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Roberts, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I also want to express my gratitude to President Obama and Secretary Vilsack for the confidence in me to take on this important responsibility. If supported by this Committee and confirmed by the United States Senate I look forward to building a strong working relationship with each one of you. Again, thank you, and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JULY 28, 2011



July 27, 2011

Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Pat Roberts, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
416 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Roberts:

I am writing in support of the nomination of Brian Baenig as Assistant Secretary of Congressional Relations at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Mr. Baenig has dedicated his professional career to agricultural policy and is well-qualified for this position. He understands the importance of coalition building and has a full understanding of how USDA can work hand-in-hand with Congress to identify opportunities for rural America and develop programs to benefit agricultural producers.

While he has held several posts since, I first became acquainted with Mr. Baenig when he served as Senior Policy Advisor to Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont. I have always found Brian to be thoughtful, measured and fair. He is recognized within the dairy industry for his integrity and his ability to work with diverse stakeholders on technical and complex issues. He is and has been invested in the success of rural America, a quality which I believe will make him an outstanding liaison between USDA and Congress.

I respectfully urge you to approve the nomination of Brian Baenig as Assistant Secretary of Congressional Relations at USDA.

Sincerely,

Richard P. Smith

Richard P. Smith
President and Chief Executive Officer

July 15, 2011

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Roberts:

We are writing in strong support of the nomination of Mr. Brian Baenig as Assistant Secretary of Congressional Relations at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Mr. Baenig has nearly 15 years of experience working on U.S. farm policy, from the vantage point of both a senior U.S. Senate staffer and senior USDA official. Among his posts, Mr. Baenig has served as Deputy Staff Director of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Deputy Chief at the National Resources Conservation Service, and, most recently, Deputy Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs.

Over the course of this time and in each capacity, Mr. Baenig earned the respect of all who had the privilege to work with him for his knowledge of the issues, understanding of the legislative and regulatory process, effectiveness in anticipating and addressing the interests of lawmakers with diverse priorities, ability to build bridges and coalitions among equally diverse stakeholders, and the sheer diligence with which he has always met his professional responsibilities. In short, we believe Mr. Baenig is exceptionally qualified for this position.

Throughout his career, Mr. Baenig has been known for his integrity, fair-mindedness, and strength of character. We believe he will make an outstanding liaison between USDA and Congress, and we urge you to approve his nomination.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation
American Soybean Association
American Sugar Alliance
Crop Insurance Professionals Association
National Barley Growers Association
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Farmers Union
National Milk Producers Federation

National Sorghum Producers
National Sunflower Association
National Turkey Federation
Rain & Hail, LLC
Southern Peanut Farmers Federation
Southwest Council of Agribusiness
US Canola Association
US Rice Producers Association
USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council
USA Rice Federation

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

JULY 28, 2011

**Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Nomination Hearing for Brian Baenig
Statement and Questions for the record
Brian Baenig
July 28, 2011**

Senator Pat Roberts

Question for Mr. Baenig

- 1) Many of the greatest frustrations that I hear about from my farmers and ranchers are not issues with the Department of Agriculture but with other agencies in the Administration - like EPA. How do you intend to work with other players in the Administration to advocate for agriculture and rural America?

Response: If confirmed, I will exercise my best efforts to establish relationships and clear lines of communication with my counterparts at other federal agencies with jurisdiction over matters that impact agriculture. I will always endeavor to make certain that agricultural interests are well represented and understood.

- 2) Mr. Baenig, you have spent much of your career working in the Senate on agriculture and rural issues. If confirmed, how do you believe your past experiences as a Hill staffer can enhance your role in this new position?

Response: I have been honored to work for Senators Wellstone, Leahy and Lincoln who all had the same bipartisan passion for supporting America's farmers and ranchers and rural communities. I will bring that same bipartisan commitment to my work each day if I am confirmed. I feel strongly that straightforward communication between the Department of Agriculture and this Committee, and your counterpart in the House, is critical to the legislative process. After working as a staff member during both the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills I know firsthand how fast and accurate information is vital to this Committee. I will always be responsive to your requests and respectful of your concerns and questions and I commit to always to be fair, honest, and straightforward with you and your staff.

- 3) These are unique times in agriculture. Our farmers and ranchers are producing at a time of great opportunity with high commodity prices and a growing world population to feed. At the same time, however, they come up each day against difficult barriers with increasing levels of burdensome regulation and unpredictable weather all over the country -- including my home state of Kansas. From your experiences working with producers both on the Hill and at the Department, what do you see as the greatest challenge currently facing American agriculture?

Response: Agriculture is a critical driver of American jobs, export growth, and economic recovery. With expanding middle classes and populations, global demand for quality,

plentiful food is at an all time high. American farmers and ranchers are leading the effort to respond to that demand. Yet as you recognize Senator, the risks that our farmers and ranchers face are significant. One only needs to look at the past few months to see firsthand the tremendous challenges our producers face that are beyond their control.

During my time working in the Senate, I came to meet many producers who undoubtedly are among the hardest-working people in the world – a world they strive to provide with safe and affordable food. These recent disasters illustrate the importance of a strong and effective safety net for those producers.

In addition our agricultural sector must remain efficient and competitive through a combination of smart policies, sound research, and innovative technology. With such support, U.S. producers will not only take advantage of market opportunities around the globe to continue to drive job creation at home, but also provide nutritious and affordable food for the world.

Senator Saxby Chambliss

Question for Mr. Baenig

1. Given your tremendous service as a Congressional staffer, you are well aware that many problems and frustrations could be prevented with better communication between the Department and the Agriculture Committees. Will you agree to work to improve communication between the Department and this Committee?

***Response:** Having served on this Committee as a staff member, I feel strongly that straightforward communication between the Department of Agriculture and Congress is critical to the legislative process and essential to the position for which I am being considered today. If confirmed, I commit to always strive to improve the communication between the Department and this Committee.*

2. I know that you would agree with me that it is vital that we have good leadership in place at the Department as it deals with many issues including implementation of the farm bill. How will you use your role to enhance communication between the Department and Congressional offices?

Brian, will you assure me that you will work for all of agriculture and be responsive to all Members of Congress no matter their party affiliation?

***Response:** I feel strongly that straightforward communication between the Department of Agriculture and Congress is critical to the legislative process and essential to the position for which I am being considered. If confirmed, I commit to uphold the longstanding bipartisan tradition of this Committee and to work for all of agriculture and with all Members of Congress regardless of party affiliation.*

Senator John Thune

Question for Mr. Baenig

- 1) Having served on both Committee and personal staff and having utilized USDA's Congressional Affairs office from that perspective, what do plan for that office to do differently should your nomination as Assistant Secretary be approved?

Response: Thank you for that question Senator. Having worked for the Committee and personal staff I know and appreciate the importance of getting timely responses and information. As I said in my opening statement. if I have the honor of being confirmed for this position, I believe constant and effective communication is the key to success. I firmly believe in the bipartisan nature of how this committee has always operated and look forward to continuing that.

I am very fortunate that those who have previously held the position of Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations have set a very high standard, and if confirmed, I look forward to continuing this tradition. I will strive to always communicate the Department's views to you and represent your thoughts and concerns to the Secretary in an honest and straightforward manner.

- 2) Can you tell us more about what role you expect the office of Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs will play in presenting this Administration's and Secretary Vilsack's farm bill proposals to Congress as we begin to draft the 2012 Farm Bill?

Response: In the coming months as development of the farm bill progresses, I look forward to working with you, and every Member of the Committee, to provide the Administration's views as well as any technical assistance you may need to complete the drafting of the bill.

Having a good dialogue between the Committee and USDA will be important to me as the Committee works to develop a farm bill that addresses the needs of rural America and the Nation.

Senator Amy Klobuchar

Question for Mr. Baenig

- 1) Agricultural producers across the country have been hit by flooding, drought and other disasters. This summer livestock and poultry producers in Minnesota faced significant losses due to extreme heat. The Department of Agriculture plays a crucial role helping producers to access the suite of permanent disaster programs that were created in the 2008 Farm Bill. How can the U.S. Department of Agriculture Congressional Relations facilitate communication following a natural disasters or market collapse to help farmers and ranchers?

Response: Ensuring that farmers and ranchers are aware of the disaster programs that are available at the Department is critical. If confirmed, I will ensure that the Department provides information to communities that are affected by natural disasters or market collapse. In addition, I will work with you and your colleagues to make sure that the Department provides you timely information on the various disaster programs that are available to producers.

- 2) The 2008 Farm Bill included a number of new programs as well as important reforms to existing programs that strengthened the farm safety net. As someone that has worked as a staffer in the Senate, including Senator Wellstone from Minnesota, in what ways were federal agencies helpful for you and your former boss in your advocacy of farmers and ranchers, and how do you think that experience could help you in a new role at USDA Congressional Relations?

Response: During my time on the staff of Senators Wellstone, Leahy and Lincoln I found quick and accurate information about issues that impacted constituents vital to helping my boss. I believe constant and effective communication is the key to success, and if confirmed for this position I look forward to working closely with your office.

