

**NOMINATION HEARING: THE HONORABLE
XOCHITL TORRES SMALL**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
**COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY**
UNITED STATES SENATE
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NOMINATION HEARING: THE HONORABLE XOCHITL TORRES SMALL

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

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

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room 328A, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Debbie Stabenow, chairwoman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Stabenow [presiding], Brown, Klobuchar, Bennet, Smith, Luján, Warnock, Welch, Fetterman, Boozman, Ernst, Hyde-Smith, Marshall, and Braun.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Well good morning. I call the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to order, and I think the word of this morning is “flexibility.” We have members that are having to be multiple places at once. Until we get “Beam me up, Scotty” we are just going to keep being flexible this morning.

I am going to start with Senator Luján, who has to immediately leave, but wanted to introduce our witness today, nominee today.

Senator Luján.

Senator LUJÁN. Well, Chair Stabenow and to the Committee members, thank you for the time this morning and for going out of order. I certainly appreciate that. To our Ranking Member, it is good to be with you again, sir. Thank you for this important hearing.

Today I have the honor of introducing my friend, the Under Secretary for Rural Development for the United States Department of Agriculture, Xochitl Torres Small.

Her passion and determination have been an ongoing inspiration, and she quickly earned the respect of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle due to her drive to make real progress on issues facing rural America.

In her current role as Under Secretary for Rural Development USDA, she oversees loans and grants to provide infrastructure improvements, business development, affordable housing, community facilities such as schools, public safety, health care, and high-speed internet access in rural, Tribal, and high-poverty areas. During her leadership, USDA Rural Development secured \$2 billion to support rural broadband through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill.

Torres Small has worked tirelessly on behalf of thousands of Americans, who have been the beneficiaries of her passion and determination to make our country a better place to live, work, and raise a family. I thank her for joining us here today and for answering our questions.

Madam Chair and to the members of the Committee, for the past couple of months, like all of you, I have been honored to travel throughout New Mexico with listening sessions, to talk to farmers and producers about the upcoming farm bill. As we have a conversation and we understand the priorities that families have all over the rural parts of my State, they always ask for one person, Xochitl Torres Small. It is just refreshing when you are visiting with folks who are so busy and so preoccupied with daily responsibilities, but they take time to check on someone that they care about and someone that cares about them.

I want to thank you, to our Under Secretary, Xochitl Torres Small, for being with us here today, and I thank our Chair and our Ranking Member, and I look forward to a good hearing.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you so much. What a wonderful tribute, so thank you so much, Senator Luján.

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

Chairwoman STABENOW. As we know, our Committee has deep understanding of the vital role that the U.S. Department of Agriculture plays in our country, and from farmers and ranchers feeding America and families trying to make ends meet, to the more than 46 million people living in a rural community around the country, the USDA touches the lives of countless Americans every single day. I am pleased that we are here today to consider a nominee who shares our understanding of, and appreciation for, this Department.

Under Secretary Torres Small, welcome, and congratulations on your nomination to serve as the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. Your impressive and wide-ranging background makes you an ideal candidate to help lead the nearly 100,000 public servants USDA has stationed at more than 4,500 locations across the country and around the world.

Ms. Torres Small has strong roots in the agricultural community. The granddaughter of farmworkers, she grew up in the borderlands of New Mexico and understands both the virtues of and the challenges faced by our rural communities.

She is also a trailblazer, as the first woman, the first person of color to represent New Mexico's Second congressional District in Congress. As a Congresswoman, Ms. Torres Small served on the House Committee on Agriculture, showing that she is deeply committed to food and farm policy. She prioritized investing in high-speed, affordable internet and modern, reliable water and wastewater systems for her constituents, making it easier for children to learn and farmers to grow.

In the summer of 2021, I was proud to support her nomination to be Under Secretary of Rural Development at USDA, a position in which she was confirmed unanimously. At the time, rural communities were still reeling from the pandemic. Her leadership was vital to carrying out USDA Rural Development's mission of providing communities, and the small businesses and local governments that lift them up, with the support and resources that they need to be successful.

Ms. Torres Small's leadership and advocacy before Congress was critical in our efforts to secure \$2 billion to expand rural broadband through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. During her time as Under Secretary, Rural Development was the first Federal agency to invest Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds and physical infrastructure for high-speed internet. She also moved swiftly to make Rural Development funding available, which reduced energy costs for farmers and small businesses.

Last year, Congress made the largest investment in rural electric since the New Deal, and under her stewardship, USDA has been a leader in developing and delivering these benefits to our rural communities.

It is clear to me that Ms. Torres Small has a proven track record as a strong leader, which will be needed as the Department faces unprecedented challenges, like tackling the climate crisis and helping farmers manage geopolitical risks.

Thank you again for being here today, Ms. Torres Small, and I look forward to hearing about your plans for the Department and your vision for the future of agriculture.

Before turning this over to Ranking Member Boozman, I do want to say, though, also a thank-you to our former Deputy Secretary, Dr. Jewel Brunaugh, for her exemplary public service. Dr. Brunaugh was a leader in advancing equity at the Department and supporting mental health in our rural and farming communities, and in so many different ways was an amazing leader. We thank her.

Now I will recognize Senator Boozman.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN BOOZMAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM
THE STATE OF ARKANSAS**

Senator BOOZMAN. Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for holding this very, very important hearing today, and we appreciate Xochitl Torres Small for being here today as we discuss her nomination for the job of the Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture, and we would like to welcome her back to the Committee and her supporters.

As the second most senior official at the Department, the Deputy has significant responsibilities over nearly 100,000 employees, 29 agencies, and 4,500 locations in the U.S. and abroad. Managing such a large and sprawling agency is not easy. Upon your confirmation you will have your work certainly cut out for you, but you will also have an opportunity to improve the operations of the Department at a pivotal time.

Regardless of agency, employer, or location, our farmers, ranchers, schools, food banks, rural communities, all individuals and organizations that work with USDA deserve to have clarity and certainty at the end of every interaction with the USDA. This Committee deserves that too. As a Deputy, a focus on creating a culture of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness will make that a reality.

To this day, USDA has been unable or unwilling to accurately tell the Committee how billions of dollars provided during the pandemic have been spent and what remains unspent. We have asked for this information in emails and letters to the agency, only to

have the correspondence go unanswered. The lack of transparency about USDA's spending, the lack of meaningful response to Congress, and the lack of accountability by USDA is troubling.

Let me be absolutely clear. I do not believe that you are responsible for this specific issue. As the Deputy you must provide leadership to USDA's appointed officials and the career agency heads, and create a culture of accountability.

We have heard over and over again that the USDA's application processes are too complicated for the citizens in rural communities that need to access them. I know this is a concern that you share within the Rural Development programs as we visited about it extensively, and just recently, in a subcommittee hearing held by Senator Bennet and Senator Marshall we heard very similar comments regarding conservation programs. I have also heard from scores of farmers in Arkansas and around the country about the administrative burden required to access Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs.

If USDA embraces transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, the Department cannot only correct these issues but meaningfully improve the experience of those that access these programs. Should legislative changes be necessary, we will certainly be glad to work with you to ensure the programs throughout the USDA are being delivered in a timely and efficient manner. Legislative changes without a change to the Department's culture, however, will not yield the desired results.

I have greatly enjoyed working with you as you have served Rural Development. I have appreciated your thoughtfulness and your willingness to take the time to visit Arkansas and to understand the issues my State faces, and for that matter, to visit so many areas throughout the country and do the same thing. I believe that you are very well qualified to serve as the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. I look forward to hearing more from you today and a swift confirmation process.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you so much.

Before turning to you I want to submit, for the record, a number of letters with many, many groups that are supporting your nomination. I would place this in the record, without objection.

[The letters can be found on pages 32–53 in the appendix.]

Chairwoman STABENOW. Now before your opening comments, Ms. Torres Small, if you would stand. We have two housekeeping matters. First, we will administer an oath, so please raise your right hand.

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

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I so swear.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you. Second, do you agree that if confirmed, you will appear before any duly constituted committee of Congress if asked to appear?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I so swear.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you so much.

Now we will proceed and look forward to hearing your opening comments.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. XOCHITL TORRES SMALL, NOMINEE
TO BE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF THE UNITED STATES DE-
PARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to come before you today.

I am deeply grateful for the path that has brought me here. I am the granddaughter of farmworkers, the daughter of educators, and am blessed by the love and support of a wonderful husband, family, and friends in New Mexico. I also want to thank Senator Luján for his mentorship and support.

Today is Día de las Madres, so thinking about Dr. Bronaugh and thinking about the many women who brought me here, I am especially grateful for that.

My own roots are both rural and urban, agricultural and international development, blue collar and white collar. What I love about this Department is that it brings all of those things together. The nutrition that fuels our lives means that we are all, each of us, connected to America's farmers. It is what connects all of your constituents in each of your States. Although I am sure that your urban constituents may call with very different issues than your rural constituents, we are all connected by land, we are all connected by resources, and we are all connected by food.

The position for which I seek might be described as part manager, part departmental Ambassador. When it comes to management, one of the first things I learned as Under Secretary is to win over the constituents that we serve. It means also winning over USDA employees. I have often told the story about a woman in Alabama who did not trust the government to provide her clean water because the government had let her down so many times before, and it took a Rural Development employee knocking on the door, and having a conversation with her, to get her to trust again.

We have the same challenge with many of our incredibly devoted professionals. One of the scores in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey that they score highest on is the comment, "It is important to me that my work contribute to the common good." In fact, they score off the charts on this, because they believe in the work that they do, and that is why I believe in Rural Development.

I also know that our employees at Rural Development and USDA face significant challenges, whether it is outdated technology that hinders their ability to comply with congressional directives, antiquated loan and grant applications that mean we are not serving the people who need and deserve our support, and the ongoing need to do more with less, which sometimes means accepting retirements while also maintaining a hold on hiring.

That is why I am eager to work with you, to roll up my sleeves, to be able to do the management side of this job, because the people of this department, it is the glue. It is the glue that connects our programs together, and much more importantly, connects our programs to the people who deserve our support. If confirmed, the management side of the position would happily be front-of-mind for me, every single day.

The Ambassador side of the job, I have learned from you, is important too. It means being a representative in front of Congress,

in front of our sister agencies, to make sure that they understand farmers' and ranchers' needs, and to in front of the people that we serve. I would be a proud representative as Deputy Secretary.

Now having run for Congress twice and only served once, I know that you cannot please everyone all of the time. I am not only familiar with what it is like to grapple with multiple views, I truly believe that that difference of opinion is what makes our country stronger. It allows us to find better solutions, and it allows us to find ways forward that will last the test of time. I have seen that in this very Committee, when many of you have pushed me to make Rural Development's programs easier to access, because no one should have to have a team of grant-writers to get our support. Now I know there is still a lot of work to do there, and I am eager to get to continue to do this work.

Common ground is what grounds my work. If we do not agree on nine things then I am hopeful that we can find a tenth thing that we do agree on and work with that. That is why I feel that I am the right person for this job. That is why I want to do you proud, and that is why I look forward to our discussion today. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Torres Small can be found on page 28 in the appendix.]

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much. Continuing our flexibility this morning, I am going to defer to Senator Brown to ask the first question, and then we will go back to regular order.

Senator BROWN. You know, I love sitting on this Committee and looking over your—not that I do not like looking directly at you, but looking over your left shoulder. It took Chair Stabenow to be the only portrait here that has actual farm products in it. It is not a novel—well, I guess it is a novel idea. Thank you for that.

From your comments, Madam Secretary, and I know Senator Boozman and Senator Stabenow and Tina, all of us agree on this, that this Committee, in many ways, is the least partisan committee in the Senate, and almost any time that Wes and I and others come up with ideas, in our roundtables or whatever, we go to a Republican, in our case, and find a partner, and that is why this Committee, and that is why the farm bill is going to be the best farm bill this Committee has ever passed, Madam Chair, in her last two years.

I want to talk for a moment about East Palestine. I think you know the train derailment there. I go there more often than once a month. Today, an important day for East Palestine, and I think for the Nation's safety, that the Brown-Vance bill on rail safety, bipartisan, will pass out of the Commerce Committee today, bipartisanly, and I think we will have enough votes to get 60 in the Senate soon. Senator Schumer wants to schedule it as quickly as possible, and President Biden has assured us he is going to sign it.

I want to talk a little bit about Norfolk Southern's failures to make appropriate safety precautions. We know all that. USDA's Rural Development plays an important role in communities like East Palestine. Every time I visit, I hear from residents eager to rebuild their communities and their businesses, wanting just to re-

turn their lives to some sense of normalcy, but beyond that, what USDA can do to make a difference in their lives.

I just wanted a public commitment from you to work with my office and local leaders and businesses, including credit unions and banks serving these small counties, to convene an economic empowerment forum where the community can come together to learn about opportunities for creating economic vibrancy and prosperity.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Senator Brown, thank you for your commitment to this issue and also thank you for Jonathan McCracken, who is now the State Director in Ohio, working very hard on this issue. I actually spoke with him earlier today, and so I do commit to participating in that convening and supporting it, recognizing that he has been on the ground for, and working very closely with your team from a Rural Development point of view. We will continue to work, and I appreciate your focus on this and driving us as well.

Senator BROWN. Thank you. Senator Stabenow and her staff know Jon was with me I think from my second month in the Senate until you stole him. I mean, we do not think of human beings that way exactly, in terms of stealing, but still, okay.

Two months ago, Senators Casey and Fetterman, in the State just east of mine, and I wrote to Secretary Vilsack and Administrator Regan about the impact of the East Palestine train derailment could have on farmers in our area. I raised the issue with Secretary Vilsack. I have met dairy farmers two miles from the derailment who cannot sell their milk, even though they can test it and it is not contaminated, but who is going to buy milk from a farmer that close? Who is going to buy beef—local farmers with small beef cattle farms cannot sell their beef either because people that have been their regular customers. We know we need to do some very specific—we do not know all the answer, by a long shot, how to fix this.

Would you commit to working with my office and Committee staff to provide the kind of technical assistance on changes that could be made so that USDA has the tools to respond to these kinds of disasters?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Senator, from my perspective at Rural Development, we have been working very closely with your team on the existing challenges both when it comes to water as well as the community facilities that might be available or support that might be available in the future. I recognize that you are talking about more specifically farm testing and FSA's work, which is not currently within my purview. If confirmed as Deputy Secretary I look forward to working with you on these issues.

Senator BROWN. Thank you. In this case, taxpayer dollars should not be spent on this testing. It should be Norfolk Southern. I met with the CEO last week. He says to my face, he has said publicly they will continue to cooperate, and they are going to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to do a lot of this, as you know.

Last thing. I introduced, along with several people on this Committee—Senator Smith, who is sitting here, Senator Fetterman, Senator Bennet, who was here earlier, Senator Welch—on our Local Farms and Food Act. Will you work with us to continue to build support for farmers selling their produce locally, with food

stamp benefits, SNAP benefits available to farmers markets, all the things we do that way, so good, nutritious food stays in the community and the wealth created by that stays in our community?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Senator Brown, I deeply appreciate your connection to building local markets and supporting nutritious food. I am not specifically familiar with the bill but look forward to learning more about it.

Senator BROWN. You will be, Madam Secretary. Thank you.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Very good. Expanding on what we have been doing to build on the local food economy is so much a part of everything. We certainly learned during COVID how critical it was to our access to food as well, in local communities. Thank you, Senator Brown, for your work in this area.

I am wondering if you might speak a little bit. You talked about as Deputy Secretary that you would be the chief operating officer for the Department, which is so important, overseeing all of the operations and the work force of over 100,000 employees, who I think we need to thank every day—they have been through a lot, and we certainly appreciate all of their work—working with Secretary Vilsack and so on to deliver on the mission.

From our perspective, as we write the farm bill, the partnership with USDA has never been more important as we work on all of these issues that are so important. Could you talk a little bit more about your priorities, if confirmed as the Deputy Secretary, and how do you plan to use the lessons that you have learned from your time as Under Secretary of Rural Development as you go to this new role?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. When I started working as Under Secretary for Rural Development I realized that there is a real need to focus on operations because it is fundamental to making sure that rural people have the Rural Development that they deserve, that there are programs that are easy to access. Although sometimes that is about looking at the regulations, which would come under the purview of Deputy Secretary, sometimes it is also about the technology, making sure that the system that we are investing in works well on the front end for customer service, and that we are prioritizing those investments.

Sometimes it also is about having an onboarding strategy that truly prepares the next generation of USDA work force to be customer service focused and to have those skills to provide that outreach.

If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I would want to focus on being that customer service agency that our farmers and rural people rely on, and all of the back-end work that supports that effort.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Absolutely. When we look at transitioning, because, I mean, you have done a terrific job in your current role, and Rural Development has been tasked with implementing a number of really important things, including the largest investment in rural electric since the New Deal. If you are confirmed, how will you ensure a smooth transition with the person coming in after you, and how do you hope to continue your own leadership on rural issues?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Rural Development has done some incredible things in the last two years, and it is because of a great team. When we look at the investment that has been received through the Inflation Reduction Act, through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, being the first to get funds out for infrastructure for high-speed internet, it was a team that worked day in and day out together.

My role as Under Secretary ended up focusing on a lot of those operations that would keep our team going into the future. One of the things that I did early on is prioritize employee meetings all across the country, because Rural Development is like other parts of USDA but pretty unique across the Federal Government, that we have over 450 offices across the country and people living in the communities they serve. It was really important for me to go and listen to them.

Out of those meetings we put together an executive report called Team Rural Development, that identified some of the key challenges that folks are facing, like continuity in the hiring process or outdated technology, and identified priorities for how we can best address them. That was going to be my blueprint for the next two years, but now, hopefully, it will be a great guide for whoever comes in as Under Secretary.

We have also set up a State Office of Operations, led by Director Basil Goodman, who has done an incredible job making sure that our field operations remain connected to program design that happens in headquarters. Having that consistent channel of communication will be crucial for the long term.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Great, and thanks. Let me ask a little bit more about local foods, and Senator Brown was talking about that, but local and regional food systems, because obviously USDA is playing a critical role, and there are opportunities now to reach to support more local processing or regional processing or urban agriculture or a whole range of things that really broaden people's understanding and support for agriculture as well as access to healthy foods.

Would you talk a little bit more, from your perspective, about what it means to be building or strengthening local and regional food systems? I am assuming that you will work with this Committee and work with me to make sure we are doing that. I would love to have any further thoughts that you have on that.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Rural Development has had a great opportunity in the wake of COVID to invest in food system resiliency, and a fundamental part of that is multiple options when it comes to markets. When I was in Florida, for example, I got the chance to meet a rancher who diversified his markets, investing in the bull line as well as cattle and grass-fed cattle, but also doing a U-pick blueberry, because he was connecting to people who were coming to visit Disney World but also wanted another experience. He was able to keep his farm in operation, even though he was facing significant land pressures, because he was finding ways to connect people to that new industry.

I think there are opportunities like that, place-based opportunities, in Michigan with cherries, we should take great advantage of, and all across the country.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Great. Thank you very much. Senator Boozman.

Senator BOOZMAN. Thank you, Madam Chair, and Under Secretary Torres Small, we enjoyed you coming to Arkansas and really had a great discussion, lots of good questions. One of the things that came up repeatedly was what you said in your opening statement about the fact that you should not have to hire a grant-writer to be in a situation to access the programs that farmers and communities that are out there, but they are so difficult to access.

One of the things that the Chair and I have been concerned about is getting specialty crops involved—and there are lots of programs for them, but many of these are small producers and they simply get frustrated. They do not understand how to work the system.

Can you describe a little bit about what you have done, and are thinking about doing, to address this issue, and how those actions will inform other Department process reforms if you are confirmed?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you so much, Senator Boozman, for hosting that event, that listening session. Much of the work that we have done at Rural Development has come from sessions like that, where we learn about a problem and then do the investigation of how do we address it. ReConnect is a good example of how we are able to address some of those challenges.

One of the things we heard from under-resourced communities is that they were having trouble coming up with a match to be able to qualify for ReConnect support for high-speed internet. We identified places where it made sense to remove that match so they could gain access, the places that needed it most.

Another place that we have been able to make, that we are investing to make it more accessible is with our most direct customer, people who apply for mortgages through our Rural Housing Program. Through my service as Under Secretary for Rural Development we have prioritized investing in a new system that will make it easier, will compare with the private marketplace so that you can apply online, hopefully you can put in your information and a lot of it will pre-populate, all of the things that I took for granted when I took out my mortgage but right now is not available.

Senator BOOZMAN. Very good. USDA plays a critical role in representing the interests of farmers, foresters, and rural communities in informing other Federal agencies' actions that may impact agriculture in rural communities. It is notable that agencies like the FDA and EPA produce better regulations and programs when their USDA counterparts are involved. Examples include USDA's Office of Pest Management Policy's involvement in pesticides, APHIS's work on plant and animal biotechnology, USDA's leadership on Codex and food safety, et cetera.

If confirmed, how will you engage other agencies, including FDA, EPA, and the other Departments of Labor, Transportation, to ensure their decisions fully consider the potential impact on America's farmers, ranchers, foresters, and rural communities? How are you going to work with others?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. This was a message I heard loud and clear, both in a staff interview and conversations with you and others,

and it is something that I care a lot about as well. As Rural Development, we are the only agency that has a clear mission of serving rural America. When the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed and it did not include money through Rural Development for water and wastewater, but as someone who cares very deeply about that issue, we decided to work with EPA to find ways that we could leverage our expertise in rural areas and help make sure that States had the resources they needed and the support they needed to invest in rural areas. I am very proud that the Closing the Wastewater Access Gap has allowed us to partner in that way and find ways to better make sure those funds are working together.

I think there are opportunities across the Federal Government to do similar work, where we are leveraging our rural experience and making sure that farmers and ranchers voices are heard.

Senator BOOZMAN. Very good. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much. Senator Bennet.

Senator BENNET. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you very much, Ms. Torres Small, for being here. It is so wonderful to have a neighbor in this job and somebody who I know understands the challenges that we are facing out in Colorado and across the Rocky Mountain West. I also want to thank you for coming to the San Luis Valley and visiting our farmers there. You have an open invitation to come back any time you want. We would love to have you.

We had a chance to catch up a little bit about the red tape at the Department of Agriculture when you were in my office the other day discussing this hearing. I recently heard about another case. This case was in Mineral County, Colorado, very, very rural Colorado, a county in my State with a population of only 865 people, but geographically large at the same time.

Mineral County received a Rural Development Community Facilities Grant, which is the good news. Prior to accessing these funds they had to draft a request for a proposal that took two months for USDA to approve. Then they had to advertise the Request for Proposals in a printed newspaper three times, to meet the eligibility requirements. It took this county, with a staff of only three people, an extra year to access the grant funds because of these outdated and, in my opinion, unnecessary requirements. I do not think this is how our Rural Development programs should function. I think we can agree, I hope, that we need to streamline applications, we need to reduce the burden of our small towns and rural communities and local businesses and family farms and ranchers.

For me these are not just words. I have been on this Committee for 14 years, and I feel like things have not gotten better in terms of what our farmers and ranchers, and rural communities are saying.

I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how you are going to approach this question of reducing unnecessary contracting requirements, which hold back programs like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, so that we are in a position someday to not have the same conversation over and over and again. We owe it to the agriculture producers in this country who are actually just trying to do the right thing, for themselves and for their families

and for their communities. How are we going to know that we are actually making progress, finally eliminating some of this delay and red tape?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you so much, Senator Bennet, for continuing to push us on this.

Senator BENNET. Well, I have not pushed on you very successfully so far.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Well, speaking of the Community Facilities Grant in Mineral County, I believe it was a woman from Creede that I spoke to about this issue. It does appear that we were able to resolve it. However——

Senator BENNET. Okay——

Ms. TORRES SMALL.—it took way too long.

Senator BENNET [continuing]. you are hired for knowing that, first of all, so thank you.

[Laughter.]

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I spoke directly with her, and it did take too long. My understanding of what it was, was it was a design-to-build plan, and so Rural Development has some current requirement that you should have to have a competitive bid.

Now I agree with you that sometimes in rural places that does not work, and finding an engineer is really hard. The more you are able to bring us these challenges, we can dig into the details, find out what the problem is, fix it for that person, but also look at the policy behind that. Because here there was an exception process, but it was burdensome. How do we make sure that the exception process recognizes that there is maybe only a staff of two people in that office.

Senator BENNET. I have been around this long enough to know that the Department is full of well-intentioned people, whether they are in Washington or whether they are out in Colorado. Actually when I say “full,” that is not accurate either, because there are a lot of places where we have got empty FSA offices and other offices, and that is clearly an issue that we need to deal with together.

We have got to realign the incentives at the Department so that we are being timely and being responsive and being flexible.

I am now out of time, so I will send you the other questions, which are about drought, and are about our forests, but they are all related. I look forward to helping you put us in the position to have a different conversation than the one that we have been having over the last 10 years or so. Thank you. Thank you for your willingness to serve.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much. We all look forward to working on these in the context of this farm bill, so thank you for your leadership.

Senator HYDE-SMITH.

Senator HYDE-SMITH. Thank you, Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman, for hosting this, and thank you for being willing to serve and stepping up and mainly for your pleasant disposition. You can just tell, you are so willing and eager to do this. That is a great attribute.

Under Secretary, Americans’ robust science-based pesticide regulatory system is essential to assuring consumers of the safety of

pesticide products, which are vital in protecting our Nation's food supply. The USDA Office of Pest Management Policy develops and coordinates the Department's policy on pesticides and integrated pest management. Further, OPMP provides vital input and data to EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs in reviewing the registration and re-registration of crop protection tools.

Ensuring EPA conducts a timely, predictable, transparent, and science-based review of these products is critical in order for producers to have access to safe and effective tools to protect against the pests and the diseases. If confirmed, what steps will you take to ensure OPMP continues its essential interagency work with EPA in the registration and re-registration of crop protection tools, and how will you ensure the benefits and impacts to agriculture are appropriately considered in EPA's review process?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Senator Hyde-Smith, thanks so much for this question and your clear attention to detail here. It is something that was brought up also in my staff interview and was very illustrative of the role that USDA plays in making sure that farmers and ranchers and their opinions are communicated across not just USDA but across the Federal Government, and also building a strong system of communication so that we are all working together.

On issues like this in the past I have been involved, not with pesticides but with multiple agency interactions. From Rural Development one thing I have learned is that communication is key, and that sometimes even within our own department we are not always talking to each other. Making sure that we are busting those silos across mission areas is really important, so that we can leverage, as you mentioned, the science, the experience, the economics, all of those pieces, to look at the issue.

In this case, regarding pesticides, I did commit in the staff interview to learning more about the issue and making sure that USDA is helping provide, in our areas of expertise, information to the agency.

Senator HYDE-SMITH. Thank you for those comments. As a former Ag Commissioner we have had lots of issues there, and it brings back flashbacks, actually.

If confirmed, will you work to ensure OPMP has the staffing and resources that it needs? In your testimony you mentioned USDA's issues with staffing, retention, and low employee morale. I recently discussed USDA's issue with attracting and retaining APHIS and Food Safety Inspection Services veterinarians with Secretary Vilsack at an Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee hearing. I would like to followup with you.

I think it is very important to Congress to closely examine this, given the current highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak, something that used to keep me awake at night. Although APHIS is doing the best it can in the midst of the worst animal health emergency in U.S. history, it is clear that the agency needs to improve staffing resources.

Please tell us more about what your plan will be to address these staffing issues at USDA, if confirmed, specifically in regard to the shortage of veterinarians in APHIS and FSIS, and what we, as

Congress, need to consider for how to best support your efforts there.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. First, thank you so much for your focus on employees and that strong connection to customer service that is a fundamental part of who USDA is. In my experience at Rural Development I have certainly seen the challenges when it comes to recruitment, making sure that we have the best applicants, as well as hiring and making sure that we are dedicating resources to hiring.

It has been a challenge, and I will just be very honest with you. Sometimes with the budget we have to hire in fits and starts, and that impacts our ability to recruit because we do not have just a regular system of hiring.

It is something that I have worked to pay a lot of attention to, also on the training and onboarding piece, right, how do we make sure, as we bring people on they have the training for customer service, they know where all of the levers are that they can pull in order to best serve someone, and that they practice a strong culture.

One of the things I have also learned is that each mission area, or even each agency within Rural Development has different needs. In other places they have the funds to do the hiring, but now it is about building back up that system, or making sure that there is adequate understanding of the complexity of the positions so that they are graded at the right level.

One of the things I truly hope to get to work on, if confirmed as Deputy Secretary, is making sure that the Department has the resources to analyze their specific challenges and build a program around the needs, focusing on customer service.

Senator HYDE-SMITH. Thank you, and I am out of time, but I want to submit a question about chronic wasting disease as well, so I will do that. Thank you.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you so much. Senator Ernst.

Senator ERNST. Thank you so much, Madam Chair and Ranking Member, and thank you, Under Secretary Torres Small, for being here today and for your testimony. I appreciate our conversation yesterday in the office. It was as really great conversation, and I appreciate our shared background of growing up in rural America. You can tell your love of rural America just shows through, whether it is through your testimony, whether it is through those private conversations, but I truly do appreciate you.

Personal opinion, but I think we need a lot more women like you serving in agriculture and making sure that our farmers and our ranchers and producers are not just simply surviving but thriving. I am glad that you are also on that mission with me. I cannot overstate that point enough, and it is comforting to see your openness, your willingness, again, to address today's challenges and complex issues to make sure that this happens for those folks living in the rural areas.

On that note I do want to get into a few more specifics about concerns that constituents bring to me as I am going out, river to river, in the great State of Iowa, visiting all of our 99 counties, just all across the State. Great, great people.

Number 1, will you commit to modernizing and strengthening AFIDA and work with my staff to provide technical assistance?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you so much for bringing up this issue. As a former Member of Congress, having served on both the Armed Services Committee and the Homeland Security Committee, as well as Agriculture, I certainly understand that nexus of knowing agricultural land and who is owning it. I certainly commit to working with you on this issue, learning more about it, recognizing that there are some real challenges. We talked about the paper and the systems, and that there is not a clear, one-size-fits-all for all of the different State and local processes for land ownership. I certainly know that this is an interest of yours, and I appreciate the chance to get to work with you.

Senator ERNST. Great. Thank you. Will you commit to supporting animal disease management through electronic ID tag support and new vaccine developments?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. This is something that has come on my radar as Under Secretary for Rural Development through meat processing, because of the highly pathogenic avian influenza and the challenges there when it comes to meat processing, although not within my purview of certainly seeing the impact that education and testing has had in reducing cases for highly pathogenic avian influenza, and also the value of REE and the work that they are doing to address the disease as well.

Senator ERNST. Good. Thank you. Will you commit to sharing overall foodstock availability and the importance of the biofuels market to the rural economy with the EPA as they determine renewable volume obligations?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. This is an issue that you and Senator Klobuchar have brought up to me and recognize that my role currently does not work directly with the RVOs, recognizing that USDA has a lot of information that is important to share as EPA comes to those considerations.

Senator ERNST. You have a lot of information and great voices as well coming from USDA, and hopefully can help shape and influence the EPA.

Then do you agree that on-farm practices such as no-till, cover cropping, or precision technology help reduce carbon emissions, and if yes, will you advocate for the use of the GREET model to ensure lifecycle emissions of biofuels take full account of climate-smart agriculture?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I really appreciate this question. You mentioned my rural roots. My aunt and uncle ranched in Colorado, and I spent summers up there, and I know how hard this work is. Trusting farmers and ranchers is really important. My uncle really wanted to have a role in preserving wetlands and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I think there is an opportunity to work with farmers and ranchers who want to do that, and I look forward to learning more about the issues specifically with you.

Senator ERNST. Very good. Very good. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I look forward to supporting your confirmation. Thank you.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Terrific. Senator Smith.

Senator SMITH. Thank you, Madam Chair and Ranking Member, and Under Secretary Torres Small, welcome back to the Committee. It is great to see you here.

I want to just start by saying I have been so impressed by your work, and particularly your commitment to get out of Washington and get around the country and really listen to people and talk to people. I know as Under Secretary you came to Minnesota, and we had a great visit. We visited a creamery in central Minnesota that was called Ten Finns Creamery, named after the 10 children, I think, that this dairy had. Although they then had two more children. They did not want to change the branding, though, to 12 Finns.

We had a great visit and you listened really, really hard, and I appreciate that so much. Also you came before my Subcommittee on Housing to talk about the Rural Housing Service, so I want to touch on that in a minute.

I want to start talking a little bit, going a little bit deeper into this staffing issue, that you referred to in your opening testimony and that we have been talking about. We all know that FSA and its agents are just so crucial in bringing kind of customer-facing tool for farmers and ranchers and producers.

I frequently hear, in Minnesota, about staffing issues at local FSA offices. There is a need for increased cultural competency as agents are understanding the world that they are operating in, the different folks that they are dealing with, and also newer USDA programs, especially the programs around climate-smart agriculture. Sometimes when programs get rolled out not everybody is saying exactly the same thing about them.

Secretary Vilsack, I would add, has mentioned in his testimony about how the compensation structure and the system for Farm Service Agency staff is not as competitive as it once was, and that creates problems for retention. We have lots of retirements, so it is a big challenge.

Could you just talk a bit about what your strategy would be for improving staffing at USDA, particularly at local agencies that are so much customer facing?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. This is a crucial question, and from my Rural Development perspective it is exceptionally important, because 38 percent of our employees at Rural Development are eligible to retire in the next five years. This is a very key moment where we have got to identify how we are recruiting and hiring the best of the best, how we are making sure that we are training, we are leveraging that incredible experience that is still at Rural Development to train, and how we are preparing for that loss.

One of the things I have learned at Rural Development is that you have to look at the situation from a few different standpoints. What is our budget to do hiring and how can we think as flexibly as possible? Where are the other places where other services might be helpful to lighten the load for staff? Then what is the long-term plan about where you want your team to be?

If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I will be a level away from those plans, but understand the importance of supporting mission areas in determining those plans, and if they have resources to do so. If they are thinking about, for example, the compensation struc-

ture, making sure that and working with their teams about how to show the complexity of the works that is done, and also what is the ability to progress quickly within a grade level, for example.

Senator SMITH. Thank you. I agree with all of that, and I think that we are a policy committee and not an appropriations committee. The discussions that we are having about how we set funding targets for agencies, including USDA, I think your points are just so good about how important it is that we set the right targets so that we are not actually cutting USDA, which some would be proposing, but we are figuring out how to make sure that you have the resources to do the service that we need.

I just have a minute left, but I want to just thank you so much for your partnership as Senator Rounds and I have worked together on—I am introducing the Rural Housing Service Reform Act. This is our bill to modernize and update the essential programs of the Rural Housing Service, which are so important to small towns and rural places around the country. You and your staff have been extremely helpful in putting together that bill, which I believe will have strong bipartisan support.

Could you just talk a bit about that work and how important you see it from your perspective in Rural Development?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Folks do not always know this, but Rural Development has about a third of the housing that HUD has. They do not think of us as providing crucial, affordable housing in rural America, so that seniors can age in place and that working single parents can own their own homes.

Administrator Altoro of the Rural Housing Service is working incredibly hard to make sure that these programs are even more accessible, and we deeply appreciate the chance to work with you and provide any technical assistance that you might require on your legislation. Really have appreciated the conversations that we have had so far.

Senator SMITH. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much. Senator Braun.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you, Madam Chair. I enjoyed our meeting last week. We had a good, lively conversation.

As I told you then, the thing I hear overwhelmingly from farmers would be Waters of the U.S. That has whipsawed back and forth for a long, long time. It seems to have the rule tweaked or changed, depending on which administration is in place. I think farmers are getting fatigued from it. Their job has gotten even more complicated due to current markets and high inputs costs, all the complications of running that very difficult small business.

By and large, I was sensing a big relief when the Trump rule, you know, was acknowledged, trying to implement it, and then, of course, the Administration has completely flipped it back to where I think it is going to be in that onerous side where farmers think it is above and beyond what is necessary in terms of their own stewardship on their own property.

A couple of things. Is there any interest on your part, number 1, to listen to farmers, which I would hope would be so they can tell you what I hear all the time, where it is going they do not think there are marginal benefits to it. They think it is an example of government being overburdening. When I look at some of the

stuff they are having to contend with, or when I looked at like our own State, when I was driving between where I live to the capital and saw probably \$200 signs posted all along our new interstate when it was in a little hillside that would not ever have water in it, you know, more than a moment or two during a storm, to me that was something gone too far.

Where are you at on that? It is what I am hearing. They do not like where the new rule is going to go. Do you agree with the new rule, or do you think it needs to be tweaked to a point of more practicality?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. First, I want to respond to your point about listening to farmers. I think that is a crucial part of the work at USDA, and making sure that folks are hearing concerns and ideas and thoughts from farmers and ranchers as they are considering regulations.

We did speak about Waters of the United States when we met, and I really appreciated that. It is something that, when I worked for Senator Udall as a field representative years ago, was also an issue. That question of consistency, about going back and forth, I truly understand, because it is not just about the rule itself, but it is about is there a rule that can settle, that folks can find some peace with and everyone agree on.

That is where the listening comes into play. I think it is important that all of us are listening to each other. I think it is important that USDA communicate in our area of expertise, and then also that we are honoring the science behind decisions as well.

Senator BRAUN. 50 years ago, when stewardship and conservation and that whole idea of keeping soil on your farm probably had lots of room for improvement, I do not see that. I see most farmers now embracing cover crops and doing riparian buffers, doing grass waterways, doing all the things that looks like they are 90 percent of the way. Then I have a local farmer that gets run down by our own conservation officer because he is doing a little ditch maintenance in a ditch that never has any rain in it other than very, very occasionally.

I would say, listen, I have not talked to one farmer or one small developer that thinks the new ruling is practical and is going to give marginal benefits beyond the marginal cost. That is my observation. Do what you said you were going to do. Listen to farmers. Hear it for yourself.

The other thing I have farmers worried about conservation practices being a prerequisite for keeping their safety net in place. Are you for that, or do you think those should be completely unconnected?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I have to admit this is a place where I do not have a lot of expertise currently in my role as Under Secretary for Rural Development. I have seen real impact on the value of providing opportunities and incentives-based programs, whether it is when it comes to emergency rural health care, when it comes to grants for meat and poultry processing. I do understand the value of incentives-based, and certainly if confirmed as Deputy Secretary, to commit to looking more into the issue.

Senator BRAUN. I think if you do what you said you were going to do, listen to farmers, I would love to get a report back in three

to four months if they are telling you what I have told you, and then what you think about it after you have listened. Thank you.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much. Senator Marshall.

Senator MARSHALL. All right. Thank you, Madam Chair, and welcome Under Secretary. It is great to have you back in front of us. Congratulations on your nomination to be Deputy Secretary.

We have literally asked some of our producers back home what questions do you want us to ask you, so these are from my producers. Basically, as Deputy Secretary, you will be the COO of the USDA. We have heard from our stakeholders who are concerned about USDA's ability to timely deliver assistance and service to farmers. How do you plan to staff up and ensure USDA remains customer service oriented?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. This is a crucial question, and it takes a lot of components, and it something I am eager to dive into. A key part of it is making sure that our team has the training and the tools that they need to deliver services timely, that they have the training when it comes to customer service, so they are responding in appropriate amounts of time. Also that there is good communication across the team so that if someone in the field has a question about how a program is administered, they have got a clear connection to be able to speak to somebody in the national office. That is the key reason why we established the State Office of Operations, to be able to facilitate that dialog better.

It is also about making sure they have the tools that they need to do the job. Having updated technology systems, where you do not have to open six different programs to enter in one thing. Then it is about making sure that we are finding ways to simplify our processes, whether it is how do we get an environmental report, or an engineering report that is a little bit simpler, or that we are removing match requirements so that folks can better qualify for our programs.

Senator MARSHALL. Okay. Thank you for the answer.

The second part of the question is one you and I have talked about several times. Agriculture is not a job that is accomplished well from home. Our farmers and ranchers have to go out and work in the elements every day. They show up and they work literally sunup to sundown. I remain concerned that not just in the USDA but so many of our departments and Capitol Hill, people are working from home still.

An old saying, if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it. I am not looking for you to tell me how many people traditionally have worked from home, or they are on the road. Are people at USDA back to work in the office yet? How do you measure that, and what is your goal? What do you think it should look like?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. You know, I really appreciate you continuing to have this conversation with me because I agree with you that physical presence in the office matters. It matters that somebody can walk up to a field office and there is somebody there to open the door and talk to them about their challenges. I agree with you that sometimes it is easier for me to walk across the hall and ask a question rather than having to dial them up on Teams.

I have also learned that flexibility is important too. We talked earlier about the challenges of recruiting people, with 38 percent of our work force eligible to retire in the next five years. One of the first folks I met in Minnesota, who had just been hired during COVID, so he was really eager to interact with that RD culture, and he showed up in person at our meeting because he wanted to meet me in person. He was also asking to meet me in person because he wanted to see if it was at all possible to get a printer at his home, because sometimes it made more sense for him to print out the documents, that still have to be filed by paper, and go directly to a client rather than having to commute to the office first.

Senator MARSHALL. Right.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. That flexibility is crucial for being able to recruit and retain—

Senator MARSHALL. I respect that, but, you know, we signed up for these jobs. I signed up to be a physician. I did not have the choice of working from home. When people sign up to work for the government, no one said they could work from home. I think that we would be much better served to have our employees back to work, but I appreciate your answer.

Second question is about the technology, you mentioned, and just the application process. Senator Boozman was in Kansas recently with me. Over and over we heard from farmers, “We have to hire an accountant to fill out this application form.” They have become overly complicated.

I was working with my son just yesterday on his application for scholarship and school, and there is one form that works for every university. Our office is trying to streamline a uniform type of application process, streamline this. Are you committed to working with us and giving us the technical language to get the job done right?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I really appreciate your interest in this. I think there is a lot of work to do. Online applications are crucial. It is something that we are working on in the housing space. We have also worked on it for the Rural Energy for America program.

When it comes to one application for all programs, it can get quite complicated. For example, combining our WEP programs for water and wastewater with SRF funds, because each State delivers the SRF funds. It is really hard to create an application that would work for everything.

I recognize that there would need to be some really good conversations to figure out what is possible, and I would love to have those conversations with you.

Senator MARSHALL. Madam Chair, could I have one more question.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Yes, you may.

Senator MARSHALL. I am over my time limit here.

My producers back home feel like USDA is not fighting on their behalf when it comes to science. Many of our environmental precision agriculture practices are being shunned by the EPA. We feel like the EPA is not respecting the USDA scientists, especially when it comes to pesticides. We feel like the EPA is ignoring USDA’s suggestions for atrazine mitigation practices. EPA has ignored USDA’s suggestions for 11 safe uses of chlorpyrifos, and the DOJ

sent a single email at a late time regarding the Ninth Circuit pre-emption case.

Will you be our fighter? Will you be there fighting to represent agriculture, my producers, when it comes to working with the EPA and other departments at the White House?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. If confirmed as Deputy Secretary a fundamental part of my job is the interagency collaboration, and part of that from USDA is making sure that I am listening to farmers and ranchers in rural communities and also communicating our expertise at USDA to our sister agencies.

Senator MARSHALL. Thank you so much. We look forward to supporting your nomination, and we know you will do a great job. Let us look forward to continuing the relationship and working together. Thank you.

[Pause.]

Chairwoman STABENOW. Senator Klobuchar.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you, Ms. Torres Small. I have enjoyed our discussion and also—sorry, I just got back. We had a big Commerce markup on the train derailment bill that we got through the committee, that Committee member Brown and Senator Vance are leading, and I am a co-sponsor, so I appreciate that.

You have done a good job as Under Secretary of Rural Development, and we thank you for that, and I know that you will continue to be a strong advocate for our farmers and ranchers and rural communities.

My first question, as co-chair of the Senate Broadband Caucus is about that area of our work that we are doing right now. I think the pandemic put a big magnifying glass on problems for rural areas. Do you agree that providing broadband internet access is a key rural development priority, and could you talk about getting the USDA portion of the funds out as soon as possible?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. First, just thanks so much to you and to Congress for the investment in high-speed internet. I think it is a truly needed thing that we have seen play out in the pandemic, but also since then when it comes to access to health care close to home and making sure that folks have good educational resources as well, and the chance to do their homework, actually, at home.

Rural Development received about \$2 billion in high-speed internet funds through ReConnect, and Administrator Berge has been working incredibly hard to get that out. In fact, we believe that by the end of the summer all of the funds will be awarded.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Very good. Thank you.

Biofuel infrastructure, last Congress I led a bill with Senator Ernst that invested \$500 million in funding for grants for fueling stations. I know the Secretary knows a lot about biofuels, coming from Iowa. The bill was included in the Inflation Reduction Act, thanks to Senator Stabenow's leadership. Both consumers and retailers are eager to see these funds be made available.

Could you work with me to ensure these grants are distributed as soon as possible, maybe give me a status report on that?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you for that investment and also for your collaboration. We were talking about biofuels earlier as well. It is a crucial part of the Inflation Reduction Act. It is a crucial part of the Administration's approach to reducing greenhouse gas

emissions. At Rural Development I have had the chance to learn a lot about it.

We have distributed funds through HBIIP previously. We have announced those awards, that availability already when it comes to the Inflation Reduction Act funds.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Thank you. Minnesota is home to the Nation's largest producer of sugarbeets, something people do not always know. Some of it is that it is so cold in the northern part of our State that it is a natural freezer that goes well into May, in the ground. Could you talk about the fact that recently there have been increases in foreign imports above and beyond our WTO commitments. As you know, decisions on the sugar program are coordinated between USDA's Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs and Farm Production and Conservation mission areas. I hope that you will advocate for a seat at the table for any decisions made regarding the sugar program and work to ensure that the program does not exceed our import obligations under the WTO.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Thank you for your advocacy on this. This is not something that I am very familiar with in my purview of Under Secretary for Rural Development, but I look forward to diving into it. I am very familiar with sugarbeet production and have had good conversations with farmers and their cooperative work in the Midwest. I know that Under Secretary Alexis Taylor is paying close attention to this issue and understands the current stock-to-use ratio is 13.5 to 15.5.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Thank you.

Last, as the average age of farmers continues to creep upward, it has become harder for beginning farmers to get established in agriculture. By the way, there are a lot of answers to our work force issues in ag country. One of them, I strongly believe, is immigration reform and looking at lifting some of the caps as well as being smart about spouses working. I think every one of our States, from red States to blue and in between, is dealing with this.

The other thing we have to do I just make sure those beginning farmers and ranchers are able to get into the business. I worked to assist beginning farmers by reducing the cost of accessing crop insurance and incentivizing landowners with expiring CRP contracts to sell to beginning farmers.

What are your thoughts on assisting beginning farmers to overcome the challenges they face in getting a foothold in agriculture?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. From my purview in Rural Development I have run into farmers who are trying to add value through our Value-Added Producer Grants, for example, and also trying to find new markets. One of the things when I talk to beginning farmers the biggest challenge is access to land. Recognizing that need and helping to try, I certainly think there is an opportunity for USDA to support those issues.

It is also about, a farmer from New Mexico could tell his story of the development of his farm through the new tractors that he was able to first rent and then buy. Through RMAP within Rural Development there is a very small amount that is able to be used for farm equipment, but I know that working closely with FSA is crucial to be able to support new and beginning farmers.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you.

Senator Luján.

Senator LUJÁN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Under Secretary Torres Small, first I just want to say how proud I am to be here today with you, as a New Mexican, to watch your growth, your advocacy for people, and your ability to work across the aisle. It is incredible, and it reminds us of the tradition that has come out of New Mexico, with former United States Senator Pete Domenici, former United States Representative Manuel Lujan, who both had reputations of working with Democratic colleagues to prioritize New Mexico and make a profound difference across America. You reflect the very best of what that means. I just want to say thank you for continuing to move forward in accepting responsibilities that will transform the United States and transform New Mexico.

One area that I have been asking many questions is surrounding historically underserved communities to the United States Department of Agriculture. I know this Administration has prioritized removing barriers for historically underserved communities, and the Department recently released an interim recommendation, a report that came out of their Equity Commission.

Under Secretary, as Deputy Secretary how will you work to remove barriers for historically underserved communities to take advantage and be able to access more of the United States Department of Agriculture's programs?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I know there was a Subcommittee hearing recently where a fellow New Mexican, a hard-working farmer, came and testified and talk about how he did not always feel like USDA programs were meant for him. That is a statement that I carry with me, recognizing that it is our job to make sure that farmers know, and underserved people in rural America know that our programs are meant for them.

That means making sure that we have got the right approach to customer service, it means finding the things that are hard, that are cumbersome, and making them more accessible, and it means working together, if there are questions about technical assistance or challenges that might be legal, to be able to provide that information.

One of the things that I am really proud of is through ReConnect we have been able to make that program significantly more accessible by reducing the match requirements and by focusing portions of the funds in the areas that need it most.

I think there are a lot of lessons to be learned from ReConnect that hopefully, as we look at some of our older programs, because there are 50 programs in Rural Development. There are even tons more all across USDA. We have got to look at each and every one and figure out how we can make sure that people know that our programs are meant for them.

Senator LUJÁN. I very much appreciate that and agree with that.

One other area that I have been hearing more and more about from families across New Mexico, and it turns out that this seems to hold true across America. Even with the investment that came with the Inflation Reduction Act of nearly \$20 billion, we continue to hear how NRCS is overprescribed. We know that this program

can make or break a small, single-use, small farm, small acreage, or a large producer across America. Especially because of the fires in New Mexico, I have learned more and more about the need for improvement with NRCS as well, to make sure that it can work when it is needed most.

That plus EQIP, you know, I also believe, Madam Chair, that we could be doing a whole lot more for water conservation with another overprescribed program as well, and having irrigated all morning Monday, I certainly know where all the gopher holes are back at home now myself. I can see how that makes a profound difference for everyone.

Nonetheless, Under Secretary Torres, what will you do to ensure that USDA can deliver the critical conservation programs and other IRA provisions needed to support farming and ranching, like NRCS and EQIP?

Ms. TORRES SMALL. Even from Rural Development I know how in demand NRCS programs are. A county commissioner from New Mexico, who was in the burn scar, came up to me just recently and said, "We need NRCS." And one, that speaks to the value of the program, but two, that speaks to the demand of the program. And when programs are oversubscribed it can be hard to also say we need to make them more accessible. I understand that and really appreciate your advocacy here.

Senator LUJÁN. Thank you.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much. Senator Welch.

Senator WELCH. Thank you very much. I am proud to be a former colleague, and it is wonderful to have you here, and I also want to just acknowledge the great work that Xochitl Torres Small has done for us in Vermont, paying a visit and meeting with our rural folks. Thank you very much.

I just have one question because I think you have covered most of the terrain. Senator Marshall asked you about working back in the office, and I think it is a fair question, and I know it is an issue that, coming out of COVID, people with significant managerial responsibilities have to address. There are advantages to being in the office. There are advantages, I know, in terms of recruiting the absolute best people to have some flexibility. I know this is something on your mind and on the mind of all of our folks with significant managerial responsibilities.

I just want you to comment on your thoughts on how best to address this and how you would approach it.

Ms. TORRES SMALL. I so appreciate how many times you said "balance" in that question, because it truly is a balance. As a former Member of Congress I know how important constituent services is, and being in the office can make a difference, making sure that people can come and knock on your door. Having the best and the brightest and being able to recruit those folks is also crucial. Being able to also retain them.

About two weeks ago, I attended a retirement party for someone who has been working for Rural Development longer than I have been alive. He knows multifamily housing, inside and out, and was helping us figure out how to break down some of the silos, how to make sure that we are entering into contracts and saving multifamily housing properties faster.

When we are trying to keep someone like that and make sure we are utilizing that experience as much as possible, I want all of the flexibilities available in order to leverage that knowledge for the last few years of their work here.

Another way that we have seen the flexibility work is actually support the RD culture. For example, the technology that was provided during COVID, when many people had to work from home, allows them to now interact not just with their office, their area of office, but with the entire State, because there are offices all across the State, and then also with the national office. I think that is kind of similar to the challenges that you see with a congressional office or a Senate office, where you are bridging that divide between the national policy piece and the folks who are experiencing it on the ground.

There are all sorts of opportunities that we can leverage if we find the right balance, and if I am confirmed as Deputy Secretary, it is something I am committed to doing.

Senator WELCH. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Thank you very much. Senator Fetterman.

Senator FETTERMAN. It is so great to see you again. I do not even need to wear my glasses.

You came to my office for about 30 minutes, and we had a great conversation. I have the kind of sentiments of my colleague from New Mexico, beautiful State, and my departed one from Vermont. I have got to honestly say you are supremely qualified, and I am really just looking forward to voting for your support. I suspect a lot my colleagues will as well, too. I think we would be lucky to have you in our service and this new proposed rule.

I am ceding the rest of my time back to the Chair. Thank you.

Chairwoman STABENOW. Wonderful. Well, thank you so much. I think we have come to the end of the hearing. We want to thank you again for all of your comments and views and for working with us so closely, and I think it is very clear that there is strong bipartisan support for moving you forward to this new opportunity of leadership in the USDA.

This concludes our hearing. The record will remain open until Friday, May 12th, at 5 p.m., for members to submit additional questions and statements.

The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:23 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MAY 10, 2023

**Statement by
Xochitl Torres Small
Under Secretary for Rural Development
Before the Senate Agriculture Committee
May 10, 2023**

Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to come before you today. I am honored and humbled by President Biden's nomination and Secretary Vilsack's support of me to serve as Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture. I am here today, immensely grateful for the path that brought me before you today. I am the granddaughter of farmworkers and the daughter of educators, and am supported by a wonderful husband, family, and friends in New Mexico and beyond.

When I came before this Committee in 2021 as nominee to serve as Under Secretary of Rural Development, I could not know what lay ahead—years shaped by deeply dedicated public servants, difficult decisions underscoring how fundamentally policy is tied directly to people, and the stories of rural Americans working to stay in the place they call home. We know that a thriving, vibrant agricultural and rural America is essential to the success of our country—they supply the food, fiber, energy and water that feed and power the rest of the nation. The Biden-Harris Administration knows that when rural communities thrive, the nation thrives, and we work to support the vision of rural people and places. I am proud to currently support this work as the Under Secretary of USDA's Rural Development mission area.

Rural Development provides tools to improve housing, wastewater, high-speed internet, business development, and more across rural America. I am grateful to Congress and President Biden for providing resources through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act that have expanded high-speed internet infrastructure and clean energy investments, shaping rural America for years to come. In my time as Under Secretary, I have seen firsthand what happens when you give people the tools to shape their future—producers, workers, business owners, and families can live where they choose and not sacrifice quality of life. Rural Development's core programs support this vision, particularly when we listen and carefully coordinate among federal, state, local, Tribal, and private partners.

Rural Development does not only succeed because of its programs—it succeeds because of its people. As Under Secretary, I have had the privilege of traveling across the country—to many of your home states—to hear from people on the ground, see the impact of Rural Development's work, and visit with my own staff. Rural Development—like many mission areas in USDA—is unique across the federal government. Rural Development has 47 state offices with presence in every state. We have more than 4,000 mission-driven employees across the country who work incredibly hard every day to deliver resources to rural America. These are individuals who have been discouraged by outdated IT systems and slow hiring processes, and have felt the brunt of Department reorganizations that do not prioritize people. Yet, they remain mission driven. They have shared stories of creativity, resilience, and compassion. Their stories make me hopeful too—and give me immense faith in the future of Rural Development and the USDA workforce.

If confirmed, I look forward to carrying the lessons I have learned in my time with Rural Development to the Department of Agriculture. I share Secretary Vilsack's view that American rural life and agriculture are at a turning point, and USDA plays a pivotal role in the that future. For decades we have prioritized a "get big or get out" mentality that isn't working. It has resulted in a highly rigid and consolidated food supply chain, and a system that rarely works for a small farmer or rancher. The relentless focus on efficiency—at the expense of all else—has undercut main streets and rural economies, forced Americans away from the rural places they call home, and made it difficult to find opportunities to come back. Our focus on equity is about addressing systemic inequities, giving everyone a fair shot, and making sure that everyone has a seat at the table. Part of modernizing USDA so that it lives up to its name as the People's Department is about addressing the internal challenges that USDA faces. In the past two years, USDA has climbed to number 12 in the ranks among very large agencies in 2022; however, the Department continues to grapple with thin staffing levels, antiquated technology, low employee morale, and high attrition. Despite this, USDA staff is moving mountains to deliver on USDA's mission and implement once-in-a generation legislation. The lessons I learned with Rural Development will be critical as we recalibrate—we must center equity and climate, prioritize people, listen to the folks on the ground, and cultivate partnerships that are founded in mutual trust and respect.

When I testified before you in July 2021, I told you that "growing up in New Mexico fundamentally molded who I am: a sunny woman of her word who will always fight for the underdog." At USDA, those words have taken on new meaning for me. Fighting for the underdog means fighting for people who have a vision but often lack a voice. Keeping your word—in communities that have been let down by the federal government, to USDA employees, and to Congress—becomes paramount in building trust and hope. If confirmed, I look forward to building on this work and ensuring that I continue to build partnerships across the country and in this Committee to better serve our missions at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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**DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE
RECORD**

MAY 10, 2023

March 22, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

We write to express our strong support for the nomination of Under Secretary of Rural Development Xochitl Torres Small to serve as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Under Secretary Torres Small has demonstrated a deep commitment to addressing challenges in the agricultural supply chain, fostering economic opportunities and security through rural infrastructure investments, and fighting for the needs of rural Americans. Her dedication to public service and skilled administration of USDA's Rural Development mission area makes her uniquely qualified for the role of Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

Under Secretary Torres Small has tirelessly served agricultural stakeholders and the American people for decades. The granddaughter of farmworkers, she spent several years as a Field Representative for Senator Tom Udall (D-NM), then a United States District Court clerk, and an attorney practicing water and natural resources law. In 2018, Torres Small was elected to the House of Representatives where she served as a Member of the House Agriculture Committee. Continuing her public service as Under Secretary of Rural Development, Torres Small guided the implementation of millions of dollars in loans and grants to strengthen the agricultural supply chain, expand broadband internet service to rural communities, and expand market opportunities for rural businesses.

We believe that agricultural stakeholders, rural communities, and the American people will be well served by Under Secretary Torres Small's service as Deputy Secretary of the USDA. We strongly urge the Committee to quickly advance Under Secretary Torres Small's nomination so she can continue her important work in this expanded capacity, particularly as the Farm Bill reauthorization process is underway.

Sincerely,

American Beverage Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Frozen Food Institute
American Seed Trade Association
American Soybean Association

American Sugar Alliance
Animal Health Institute
Biotechnology Innovation Organization
Can Manufacturers Institute
Cargill
CoBank

Consumer Brands Association	National Milk Producers Federation
Corn Refiners Association	National Oilseed Processors Association
Crop Insurance Professionals Association	National Pork Producers Council
Danimer Scientific	National Sorghum Producers
Distilled Spirits Council of the United States	National Turkey Federation
Foresight USA Inc	North American Meat Institute
Growth Energy	North American Millers' Association
Illinois Soybean Association	Panhandle Peanut Growers Association
Institute of Shortening and Edible Oils	Pet Food Institute
International Dairy Foods Association	Plant Based Products Council
International Fresh Produce Association	Primient
Leather and Hide Council of America	Rural & Agriculture Council of America
Meat Import Council of America	SNAC International
National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance	South Carolina Peach Council
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture	Southwest Council of Agribusiness
National Association of Wheat Growers	U.S. Apple Association
National Confectioners Association	U.S. Cattlemen's Association
National Corn Growers Association	U.S. Dairy Export Council
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives	USA Rice
National Fisheries Institute	Virginia Cattlemen's Association
National Grain & Feed Association	Western Growers
National Grocers Association	Western Peanut Growers Association
	World Perspectives, Inc.

cc: Secretary Tom Vilsack, U.S. Department of Agriculture

May 18, 2023

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry
U.S. Senate

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry
U.S. Senate

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell:

We write to express our strong support for the Senate Committee on Agriculture's unanimously bipartisan vote to confirm the nomination of Under Secretary of Rural Development Xochitl Torres Small to serve as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and urge the Senate to swiftly call a vote for the position.

This confirmation will be a well-deserved reflection of Under Secretary Torres Small's commitment to rural Americans, not only through her administration of USDA's Rural Development mission, but through her work to improve economic outcomes by addressing challenges within the agricultural supply chain and the country's infrastructure.

Torres Small's service to New Mexico's Second Congressional district as a Member of Congress serving on the House Agriculture Committee, her time as Under Secretary, and her deep personal connection to agriculture as the granddaughter of farmworkers, underscore her vital work for the rural communities and agricultural and conservation stakeholders continuing to navigate the challenges of America today.

We believe the American people will be best served by Under Secretary Torres Small in the role of Deputy Secretary of the USDA and call on the Senate's swift completion of the confirmation process.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Energy Coalition
Alliance to End Hunger
American Biogas Council
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Soybean Association
American Sugar Association
American Sugar Cane League
American Sugarbeet Growers Association
Animal Health Institute
Aspen Community Strategies Group
California Canning Peach Association
California Citrus Mutual
California Prune Board
California Prune Board
Cargill
Center for Rural Strategies
Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)
CoBank
Crop Insurance and Reinsurance Bureau
Distributed Wind Energy Association
Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative
Farm Credit Council
Feeding America
Florida Sugar Cane League
Geno
Global Cold Chain Alliance
Great Lakes Community Action Partnership
Growth Energy
International Dairy Foods Association
International Economic Development Council (IEDC)
Land O'Lakes Inc.
MAZON

Mill

National Association of Counties (NACO)

National Association of Development Organizations (NADO)

National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG)

National Audubon

National Corn Growers Association

National Cotton Council

National Council of Farmer Cooperatives

National Farmers Union

National Grain and Feed Association

National Milk Producers Federation

National Potato Council

National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association

National Rural Health Association

National Rural Water Association

NCBA - CLUSA

North American Blueberry Council

North American Millers' Association

Northern Forest Center

NTCA - Rural Broadband Association

Organic Produce Association

Partners for Rural America

Partners for Rural Transformation

Plains Cotton Growers, Inc.

RCAP

Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers

Rural Coalition

Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)

Rural Local Initiatives Support Corporation

Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition

Save the Children

Self-Help Enterprises (Visalia, Calif.)

Share Our Strength

SNAC International

Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project, Inc. (SERCAP)

Sustainable Food Policy Alliance (SFPA)

Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc.

U.S. Beet Sugar Association

U.S. Dairy Export council



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS

March 08, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
Security & Governmental Affairs
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
Security & Governmental Affairs
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) appreciates your commitment towards agricultural sustainability, nutrition and forestry. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that the Department of Agriculture (USDA) is led by a proven legal mind and executive. In this spirit, we submit this letter in support of President Biden's nominee to serve as the next Deputy Secretary of Agriculture at USDA, Xochitl Torres Small.

Xochitl Torres Small has an illustrious record as an authority in rural development, legislation, and climate advocacy. Most notably, she has held numerous leadership positions within the House of Representatives, where she served as the representative for New Mexico's second district from 2018-2020, where she became the first woman and person of color to represent the district. She was also a member of several committees like the House Agriculture Committee, Armed Service Committee, and the Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee of the Homeland Security Committee, where she was the chairwoman.

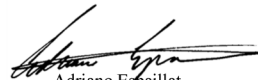
During her tenure in New Mexico, Torres Small also served as Under Secretary of Rural Development for USDA, overseeing loans and grants to improve infrastructure, affordable housing, and community facilities. During her leadership, USDA Rural Development secured \$2 billion to support rural broadband through Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. As a granddaughter of farmworkers, Torres Small grew up in the borderlands of New Mexico. She has also worked as a field representative for Senator Tom Udall, a United States District Court Judge Robert C. Brack clerk, and an attorney practicing water and natural resources law.


The CHC commends your leadership on the Committee and your collective development of sensible regulations and public policies, including those that account for the disproportionately negative impact that governmental programs in the environmental, public health, and rural development have historically had on Latino communities. Likewise, our Caucus firmly believes that Torres Small's experience and expertise in climate, environmental, rural development, and


water and natural resources law make her the most experienced, trusted, and capable candidate to lead USDA.


Thus, as members of the CHC, we reiterate our strong endorsement for Xochitl Torres Small to serve as the next Deputy Secretary of Agriculture of USDA.


Sincerely,

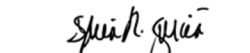

Adriano Espaillat
Deputy Chair
Congressional Hispanic Caucus

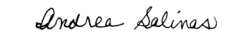

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Chair
Congressional Hispanic Caucus


Tony Cárdenas
Vice Chair of Engagement
Congressional Hispanic Caucus


Darren Soto
Vice Chair of Policy
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Teresa Leger Fernandez
Vice Chair of Communications
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Sylvia Garcia
Whip
Congressional Hispanic Caucus

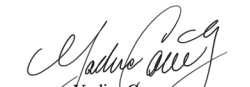

Andrea Salinas
Freshman Representative
Congressional Hispanic Caucus


Catherine Cortez Masto
U.S. Senator
Congressional Hispanic Caucus


Ben Ray Luján
U.S. Senator
Congressional Hispanic Caucus


Robert "Bob" Menendez
U.S. Senator
Congressional Hispanic Caucus


Alex Padilla
U.S. Senator
Congressional Hispanic Caucus


Yadira Carayeo
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Raul Ruiz
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Jim Costa
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Jesus "Chuy" Garcia
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



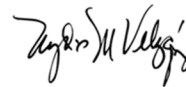
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Mike Levin
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Pete Aguilar
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Nydia Velazquez
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Robert Garcia
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Gregorio Kilili Sablan
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress
Congressional Hispanic Caucus



We help build homes and communities across rural America.

May 10, 2023

Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member John Boozman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) writes to support the swift confirmation of the Honorable Xochitl Torres Small as Deputy Secretary at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Deputy Secretary Designate Torres Small has been an incredible champion for rural communities, both in her current role as Under Secretary for Rural Development and as a member of Congress from 2019-2021.

Her nomination comes at a time when the capacity and housing challenges of rural communities are top-of-mind for many rural citizens. This is truly a time for strong, experienced, and innovative leadership at USDA to bring the needs and voices of our nation's most underserved, rural, and persistently poor places to the table.

We encourage Deputy Secretary Designate Torres Small to use her new role to elevate the resources and challenges of the Rural Development programs to the highest levels of leadership at USDA. On his first day in office, President Biden signed an [Executive Order](#) affirming the key role of the federal government in advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities. This Executive Order specifically cited rural residents and residents in areas of persistent poverty as underserved communities in need of more equitable federal treatment, and we could not agree more. Deputy Secretary Designate Torres Small has a deep understanding of the critical role of Rural Development and can bring that understanding with her into this new position.

Specifically, we encourage Congress and Under Secretary Designate Torres Small to work together to place a renewed focus on the Rural Development programs at USDA. Rural Development is home to critically important programs that serve low-

1025 Vermont Ave., N.W., Suite 606, Washington, DC 20005

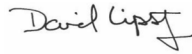
202-842-8600 hac@ruralhome.org ruralhome.org 202-347-3441

HAC is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

income rural families and communities, including both the single-family and multifamily Rural Housing Service programs. These programs provide affordable homeownership for low-income rural families, and often constitute the only rental options in our nation's smallest communities. There is a growing preservation crisis in the USDA multifamily housing portfolio that demands immediate attention. Programs like the Multifamily Preservation and Revitalization (MPR) program and the Preservation Revolving Loan Fund need significant infusions of funding to combat this crisis. There is a dearth of capacity in rural areas, necessitating a more robust focus on rural capacity building, training, and technical assistance through programs like the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI), so that small rural nonprofits are able to serve the needs of their communities.

Safe, decent, and affordable housing is foundational to health, wealth, and other life outcomes. We look forward to working with Deputy Secretary Designate Torres Small in her new role to place a renewed focus on Rural Development and the needs of rural communities. She brings the knowledge and experience necessary to be successful in this new role, and we wish her well in the confirmation process.

Sincerely,



David Lipsetz
President & CEO
Housing Assistance Council



May 12, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition &
Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition &
Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

We are encouraged by your recent comments supporting the nomination of Xochitl Torres Small, currently Under Secretary of Rural Development, to serve as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Improving Market Access Coalition (IMAC) urges the Committee to advance Under Secretary Torres Small's nomination as soon as possible.

The Improving Market Access Coalition represents U.S. log and wood chip exporters who have been economically harmed by foreign agricultural trade barriers. IMAC is working closely with USDA to resolve market access issues that have deprived exporters of key markets and caused serious economic harm to rural communities across the country. If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, Under Secretary Torres Small could play an important role in the resolution of these trade barriers. In her work at USDA and previously, as a Member of Congress, the Under Secretary has advocated for rural economic prosperity and economic opportunities for rural communities. Due to a lack of export markets, we have recently witnessed mill closures and job loss affecting these rural communities.

The Improving Market Access Coalition hopes that the Committee will swiftly advance Under Secretary Torres Small's nomination so that she can begin urgent work to support U.S. agriculture and open markets for U.S. exports.

Sincerely,

American Log Exporters Coalition
D.S. Smith
Ecolab
Georgia Exports Company
Georgia Forestry Association
International Forest Products Corporation
North Carolina Forestry Association

Peoples Industries
Pfaff Timber Group
SE Global
Tima Capital
TMX Shipping Co.
Weyerhaeuser



NATIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BEEF ASSOCIATION
CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY

April 12, 2023

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

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) supports the nomination of Xochitl Torres Small to serve as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. NCBA is the oldest and largest national trade association representing the interest of cattle producers, with 26,000 direct members and over 178,000 members represented through its 44 state affiliate associations.

The role of Deputy Secretary is an important leadership responsibility which oversees every agency within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). It is imperative that this role be filled by someone who has demonstrated strong commitment to cattle producers and agricultural communities. We believe that Under Secretary Torres Small is the right candidate to take on this key responsibility.

Under Secretary Torres Small has proven her dedication to cattle producers and rural communities through her work as a member of the House Agriculture Committee and her leadership as Under Secretary of Rural Development at USDA. During her tenure with Rural Development, she fought to secure billions of dollars for agriculture infrastructure in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. She has been committed to solving problems within the food supply chain and making sure that the people who call rural America home have the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

We believe that Mrs. Torres Small possesses the necessary qualifications to take on this important role and continue working to support Cattle producers and the American people. There are many issues currently pressing the cattle industry which USDA plays a vital role in helping to navigate. We trust that she will work alongside cattle producers to help ensure the security of our food supply.

We appreciate this opportunity to provide input to the Committee on behalf of our members. We urge swift confirmation of Xochitl Torres Small to serve as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture

Sincerely,

Ethan Lane
Vice President, Government Affairs
National Cattlemen's Beef Association



April 17, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
419 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

On behalf of the more than 220,000 American family farm and ranch members of National Farmers Union (NFU), I write to express support for the nomination of Under Secretary of Rural Development Xochitl Torres Small to serve as Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Rural America has been hit hard by ongoing market consolidation, anti-competitive corporate practices, soaring input costs, and lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is for these reasons that leaders at USDA have a deep understanding of the need to promote fairness for family farmers and ranchers and to make our nation's food security a national priority.

Under Secretary Torres Small has tirelessly served family farmers and ranchers, not only in New Mexico, but throughout the country. The granddaughter of farmworkers, she spent several years as a Field Representative for Senator Tom Udall (D-NM), then a United States District Court clerk, and an attorney practicing water and natural resources law. In 2018, Torres Small was elected to the House of Representatives where she served as a Member of the House Agriculture Committee, where she worked closely with Rocky Mountain Farmers Union. Continuing her public service as Under Secretary of Rural Development, Torres Small guided the implementation of millions of dollars in loans and grants to strengthen the agricultural supply chain. Her efforts also helped expand broadband service and build more competitive and resilient markets for family farmers and ranchers.

For these reasons, NFU urges the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to advance Under Secretary Torres Small's nomination to serve as Deputy Secretary of USDA. Thank you for your consideration of this letter of support.

Sincerely,

Rob Larew
President



NEW MEXICO FARM & LIVESTOCK BUREAU

2220 NORTH TELSHOR BOULEVARD • LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO 88011 • (575) 532-4700

May 9, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-2204

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

We write to you today to express our strong support for the nomination of Under Secretary of Rural Development Xochitl Torres Small to serve as Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Xochitl's experience throughout her career makes her the ideal candidate to serve in this extremely important position. Her previous experience as a former New Mexico Congresswoman who served on the House Agriculture Committee as well as her recent accomplishments as Under Secretary for Rural Development proves she has a vast wealth of experience which will serve her tremendously if confirmed. As Congress continues its work in drafting the 2023 Farm Bill, it is imperative that we have strong leadership with real-world experience and the background necessary to implement successful farm policies and programs.

We strongly urge the committee to proceed with this confirmation quickly so that Xochitl can assist in continuing the important work at USDA that supports our nation's farmers and ranchers.

New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau is New Mexico's largest agriculture organization, representing over 20,000 members involved in all aspects of agriculture including dairy, livestock, fruits, and vegetables. Our mission is to promote and protect agriculture in the great State of New Mexico. We are charged with the important task of representing our members' interests while advocating on behalf of agriculture.

Respectfully,

Larry Reagan



May 12, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator John Boozman,
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madame Chairwoman and Ranking Member Boozman:

On behalf of Outdoor Industry Association, I am writing to express our strong support for the nomination of Xochitl Torres Small for Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

Based in Boulder, Colorado, with offices in Washington, D.C., Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) is the leading trade association for the outdoor industry. For more than 30 years, OIA has served as the trusted convenor, resource, and voice of the outdoor industry. OIA unites and serves manufacturers, suppliers, sales representatives, and retailer members through its focus on trade and recreation policy, sustainable business innovation, and outdoor participation. The association provides its members with insights, advocacy, and opportunities for action that support the long-term success of outdoor businesses and ensure the outdoor experience for all.

Under Secretary Torres Small's extensive background as the current Under Secretary for Rural Development at USDA and as United States Representative for New Mexico make her a formidable candidate for this position. She brings extensive knowledge and expertise on issues facing rural communities, a deep understanding of the agricultural industry, and recognition of the importance of outdoor recreation for the health and well-being of individuals, as well as the economic benefits it can bring to rural communities.

Outdoor recreation is a cornerstone of American life and a pillar of our economy, contributing more than \$862 billion to our economy and supporting 4.5 million jobs. Increased support for outdoor recreation through federal investments in recreation infrastructure and rural recreation communities are critical to the continued success of our businesses and the outdoor industry.

Throughout her career, Under Secretary Torres Small has demonstrated exceptional leadership and commitment to improving the lives of those in rural areas. Her experience serving on the House Agriculture Committee, and her background in practicing water and natural resources law, provide her with unique insight into the challenges and opportunities facing rural communities across the country.

TOGETHER WE ARE A FORCE.



Moreover, Under Secretary Torres Small's demonstrated passion for diversity and inclusion aligns with the values of the outdoor recreation industry, which is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all individuals. Her leadership in expanding access to broadband and improving infrastructure in rural communities will help increase access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

Given her extensive experience and dedication, we believe that Under Secretary Torres Small has the skills and expertise necessary to help the Department of Agriculture meet the challenges of today and the opportunities of tomorrow. We strongly urge you to support her nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kent Ebersole". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "K" and a trailing "e".

Kent Ebersole
President
Outdoor Industry Association



May 9, 2022

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) wishes to extend our strong support for the nomination of Xochitl Torres Small to serve as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Secretary.

RCAP works with small communities and partners across the country to advocate for and generate economic opportunities and infrastructure investment for rural areas and to ensure that every community has the resources needed to thrive. RCAP serves more than 3.4 million rural and tribal residents each year through programs that touch the issues addressed by USDA Rural Development programs. Of the approximately 150,000 public water systems, 97 percent serve fewer than 10,000 people, many served directly by USDA programs. These small communities need a strong and capable voice within the Department of Agriculture.

The services provided through RCAP deliver critical assistance in the small and disadvantaged communities where it is needed most. As a part of our work, we partner directly with USDA to provide technical assistance and training to small rural and tribal communities to build capacity around access to safe drinking water, sanitary wastewater, and economic development opportunities. The leadership of USDA is imperative to ensuring that programs continue to provide support to rural America, and the Deputy Secretary position is critical to leading the agency and pushing for programs and funding that provide economic opportunity to those communities.

Under Secretary Torres Small deeply understands both the challenges and opportunities of rural America and is uniquely suited to serve as the USDA Deputy Secretary. More importantly, she embraces all of USDA's mission areas including the important ties between

infrastructure, housing, the rural economy, and agriculture. Should Ms. Torres Small be selected to serve, she is ready to lead immediately to meet the many rural and environmental challenges, including strengthening diversity, equity and inclusion, and building rural prosperity through investments in hard infrastructure, broadband, and rural businesses.

We look forward to working with Under Secretary Xochitl Torres Small and her team on the rural and economic issues facing our nation. RCAP fully supports her nomination as the next Deputy Secretary at USDA.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact me directly at 575-640-3386 if we can be of any assistance to you in this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Olga', written in dark ink.

Olga Morales-Pate
Chief Executive Officer, RCAP

GABE VASQUEZ
2nd District, New Mexico

1517 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3102
(202) 225-2385

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3102

April 13, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
Security & Governmental Affairs
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
Security & Governmental Affairs
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

I write to voice my support for the nomination of Xochitl Torres Small to serve as the next Deputy Secretary of Agriculture for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). When it comes to understanding my district's needs and the needs of farmers across the country, there is no better candidate for this position than Xochitl Torres Small.


Ensuring New Mexico has a strong voice at USDA will help farmers, ranchers, and consumers across our nation. New Mexico's agricultural sector is critical to our country's economy as it includes a diverse base of agricultural products and goods, including but not limited to cattle, chile, onions, cotton, dairy, hay, corn, and pecans. New Mexico's contribution to the country's economy includes being the nationwide leader in 2021 for chile and pecan production, ranking third for onion production, ninth for milk production, and sixteenth for cattle and calf production.

In her short term as Under Secretary of Rural Development for USDA, Xochitl Torres Small has illustrated an impressive record by overseeing loans and grants to improve infrastructure, affordable housing, and community facilities. Under her leadership, USDA Rural Development secured \$2 billion to support rural broadband through Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Xochitl Torres Small's unique work experience makes her particularly qualified to understand the needs of my district. She began her work in New Mexico, where she served as a field organizer in Colonias located in southern New Mexico. In Congress, she proudly represented New Mexico's 2nd Congressional District, where she always put farmers and communities in need first while sitting on the House Agriculture Committee. Clearly, there is no better choice to ensuring my constituents have a voice at USDA than with the appointment of Xochitl Torres Small to this position. I strongly support her appointment as the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this recommendation and I reiterate my strong endorsement for Xochitl Torres Small to serve as the next Deputy Secretary of Agriculture of USDA and urge your committee to move her nomination expeditiously.

Sincerely,



Gabe Vasquez
Member of Congress



February 23, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee
Russell Senate Office Building, 328A
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member, Senate Agriculture Committee
Russell Senate Office Building, 328A
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Nomination for Deputy Secretary for the Department of Agriculture– Xochitl Liana Torres Small

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

President Biden recently nominated Xochitl Torres Small as Deputy Secretary for the Department of Agriculture. The producer members of Western Growers are extremely pleased that the President has selected Mrs. Torres Small for this role and I happily provide this letter supporting her nomination. Western Growers Association is an agricultural trade association headquartered in Irvine, California. Western Growers members are small, medium and large-sized businesses that produce, pack and ship fruits, vegetables and tree nuts. All our members are headquartered in our home states of California, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico but Western Growers members produce in – and directly contribute to the economies of – 29 states overall. In total, our members account for nearly half of the annual fresh produce grown in the United States.

We have known Xochitl for a number of years now, most notably during her years of public service as a Member of Congress serving Southern New Mexico. We know her as a fierce advocate for the rural and heavily agricultural communities that make up much of the southern half of New Mexico.

We were extremely pleased that she was chosen to lead the Rural Development mission area within USDA at the beginning of the Biden Administration. We knew when she was chosen that she would do an outstanding job for agriculture and rural communities.

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 57089 · Irvine, CA 92619-7089 • **Street Address:** 15525 Sand Canyon · Irvine, CA 92618

T: 949.863.1000 • **F:** 949.863.9028 • **Internet:** www.wga.com



Rural Development is too often overlooked but is a critically important facet of the Department's mission. The Rural Development agency helps producers with critical issues of infrastructure when no one else will help or financing is unaffordable. Xochitl has served producers throughout the nation well in leading the agency with investments in cutting edge alternative fuel technologies which benefit producers and the environment. Investments that benefit producers and help the environment aren't limited to biofuels and under her leadership the agency has pushed forward to help farmers generate energy on farm via solar, wind or other means. We could go on and on but her leadership in helping producers and agriculture these last two years is clear.

Beyond helping farmers, Rural Development helps rural communities and in this role the work Xochitl has led is often underappreciated. In her tenure the agency has helped drought impacted small communities gain access to water, and has also helped communities strengthen health care access and infrastructure. She has helped with ongoing work to expand access to broadband.

We believe this strong body of work combined with her legislative experience make her an excellent candidate to serve as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. We hope the Committee will act quickly to move her nomination forward.

Thank you for considering her nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Puglia'.

Dave Puglia
President and CEO

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION & FORESTRY
Questions for Executive Nominees
118th 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 for the United States Department of Agriculture	

<i>Current Legal Name</i>			
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>
Xochitl	Liana	Torres Small	

<i>Addresses</i>					
<u>Residential Address</u> (do not include street address)			<u>Office Address</u> (include street address)		
			Street: 1400 Independence Ave.		
City: Washington	State: DC	Zip: 20024	City: Washington	State: DC	Zip: 20250
City: Las Cruces	State: NM	Zip: 88005			

<i>Other Names Used</i>							
<u>First Name</u>	<u>Middle Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Suffix</u>	<u>Check if Maiden Name</u>	<u>Name Used From</u> (Year) (Check box if estimate)	<u>Name Used To</u> (Month/Year) (Check box if estimate)	
Liana	Atzán Irwin	Torres		X	11/1984	Est X	11/2000 Est X
Xochitl Liana	Atzlán Irwin	Torres		X	08/1990	Est X	07/2012 Est X

Xochitl Liana	Atzlán Irwin	Torres Small			07/2012 X	012016 X
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<i>Birth Year and Place</i>	
Year of Birth (Do not include month and day.)	Place of Birth
1984	Portland, Oregon

<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>
Nathan	Phillip	Small	

<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)
					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

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>
University of New Mexico School of Law	Law School	08/2012	05/2015 Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>	Juris Doctor	05/2015
University of Texas El Paso	University	05/2006	07/2006 Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>		
Georgetown University	University	08/2004 Est <input type="checkbox"/>	05/2007 Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present <input type="checkbox"/>	Bachelors in Science of Foreign Service	05/2007

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, USPHS 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	United States Department of Agriculture	Under Secretary for Rural Development	Washingt on, DC	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 10/2021	Est Present <input type="checkbox"/> X
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Las Cruces, NM	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 07/2021	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 10/2021
State Government	University of New Mexico	Adjunct Professor	Las Cruces, NM	05/2021	07/2021
Self-Employment	Self	Contractor	Las Cruces, NM	04/2021	06/22/21
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Las Cruces, NM	01/2021	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 04/2021
Other Federal employment	United States Congress	United States Representative	Washingt on, DC	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 01/2019	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 01/2021
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Las Cruces, NM	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 06/2018	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 01/2019
Non-Government Employment	Kemp Smith LLC	Associate Attorney	Las Cruces, NM	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 09/2016	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 06/2018
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Las Cruces, NM	08/2016	09/2016
Other Federal employment	United States District Court, District of New Mexico	Law Clerk	Las Cruces, NM	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 08/2015	Est <input type="checkbox"/> 082016

Type of Employment (Active Military Duty Station, National Guard/Reserve, USPHS 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)
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Las Cruces, NM	Est □ 05/2015	Est □ 08/2015
State Government	University of New Mexico	Senior Tutor	Albuquerque, NM	Est □ 01/2014	Est □ 05/2015
Non-Government Employment	Law Office of Pamela D. Kennedy	Legal Clerk	Albuquerque, NM	Est □ 01/2015	Est □ 04/2015
Non-Government Employment	Law Office of Lee Peters	Legal Clerk	Las Cruces, NM	Est □ 05/2014	Est □ 08/2014
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Albuquerque, NM	Est □ 08/2013	Est □ 01/2014
Self Employment	Self	Consultant on Navajo Water Settlement	Santa Fe, NM	Est □ 05/2013	Est □ 08/2013
State Government	Utton Transboundary Resources Center	Research Assistant	Albuquerque, NM	Est □ 01/2013	Est □ 05/2013
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Albuquerque, NM	Est □ 07/2012	Est □ 01/2013
Other Federal employment	Office of United States Senator Tom Udall	Field Representative	Las Cruces, NM	Est □ 01/2009	Est □ 07/2012
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Las Cruces, NM	Est □ 11/2008	Est □ 1/2009
Non-Government Employment	Democratic Party of New Mexico	Field Organizer	Las Cruces, NM	Est □ 05/2008	Est □ 11/2008
Non-Government Employment	Planned Parenthood Federation of America	Government Relations Associate	Washington, DC	Est □ 08/2006	Est □ 05/2008
Non-Government Employment	Georgetown University Office of Residence Life	Resident Assistant	Washington DC	Est □ 08/2006	Est □ 05/2007
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Las Cruces, DC	Est □ 05/2006	Est □ 08/2006
Non-Government Employment	Georgetown University Center for Social Justice	Research Assistant	Washington, DC	Est □ 09/2005	Est □ 05/2006

Type of Employment (Active Military Duty Station, National Guard/Reserve, USPHS 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	Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies	Resident Assistant	Washington, DC	05/2005 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	08/2005 <input type="checkbox"/> Est
Non-Government Employment	DC Schools Program	Tutor	Washington, DC	08/2004 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	05/2006 <input type="checkbox"/> Est
Non-Government Employment	TMC Designs Engineering Firm	Administrative Assistant	Las Cruces, NM	02/2004 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	08/2004 <input type="checkbox"/> Est
Unemployed	N/A	N/A	Mbabane Eswatini, /Las Cruces, NM	11/2003 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	02/2004 <input type="checkbox"/> Est

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

Name of Government Entity	Name of Position	Date Service Began (month/year) (check box if estimate)	Date Service Ended (month/year) (check box if estimate) (check "present" box if still serving)
New Mexico Public School Capital Outlay Oversight Task Force	Member	01/2017 <input type="checkbox"/> Est	01/2018 <input type="checkbox"/> Est <input type="checkbox"/> Present

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.

As Under Secretary: 2022 Cooperative IMPACT Champion Award

During Congress: 2019 Mexican American Law Student Association (University of New Mexico) Fighting for Justice Award; Emerge New Mexico Democratic Woman of the Year; Georgetown University College Democrats 2019 Alumna of the Year; Border Patrol Agent Family Network 2019 Community Impact Award; American Life Sciences Innovation Council 2020 Champion of Health Care

Innovation; Las Cruces International Film Festival Hometown 2019 Hero Award; New Mexico Democratic Party 2019 Rising Star Award.

From University of New Mexico School of Law: Alumni Full Merit Scholar; Co-Editor-in-Chief, *Natural Resources Journal*; Helen Carter Writing Prize; ALI-CLE Award; Faculty Award; LexisNexis Award; NM Court of Appeals Advocacy Tournament Winner; CALI Awards: Con. Law; Con. Rights I; Elements of Legal Writing II; Oil & Gas; Property I; Graduated *summa cum laude*

From New Mexico State University: Domenici Conference Student Panelist

From Georgetown University: Dean's List, three semesters; Second Honors, two semesters; Graduated *cum laude*

From United World College USA Selections Committee: Davis Scholar, full tuition, room and board scholarship.

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>
Peace Lutheran Church	09/2016 – Present	Member, Former Choir Member, Former Expanding Vision Board Member
New Mexico Bar Association	09/2015 – Present (Inactive since 2020)	Dues paying member
Hispanic Bar Association	09/2015 – Present	Dues paying member
La Semilla Food Center	11/2016 – 01/2018	Board of Director
Mountain View Market Co-op	11/2008 – 01/2020	Former Board of Director
Leadership Las Cruces	08/2017 – 02/2018	Member

<u>Name of Organization</u>	<u>Dates of Your Membership</u> (You may approximate.)	<u>Position(s) Held</u>
United World College United States Selection Committee	04/2010 – 07/2016	Member, Chairwoman
Natural Resources Journal	09/2013 – 05/2015	Staff editor, Co-Editor-in-Chief
Native American Law Student Association	09/2012 – 05/2015	Dues paying member
Environmental Law Society	09/2012 – 05/2015	Dues paying 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>
United States Representative for New Mexico's Second Congressional District	Elected	2018	2019 – 2021

(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>
Democratic Party of New Mexico	State Central Committee (Automatic pursuant to Rule 1.2.6 as a United States Representative)	Voting member	01/2019 – 01/2021
Nathan Small for State House	Introduced spouse at several events, led canvasses and phone banks, organized GOTV efforts.	Volunteer organizer for husband's campaign	09/2016 – 11/2016

(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>
Mary Peltola (United States House of Representatives)	\$250	2022
Gabe Vazquez (United States House of Representatives)	\$2,900	2022
Gabriel Vazquez (United States House of Representatives)	\$2,900	2021
Joe Cunningham (South Carolina Governor)	\$250	2022
Kendra Horn (United States Senate)	\$500	2022
Aaron Márquez (Arizona State House of Representatives)	\$500	2022
Tara Jaramillo (New Mexico State House of Representatives)	\$500	2022
Nathan Small (New Mexico State House of Representatives)	\$500	2022
Zackary Quintero (New Mexico State Auditor)	\$500	2022
Christopher Schaljo-Hernandez (Doña Ana County Commissioner)	\$500	2022
Raul Villanueva (Grant County Sheriff)	\$500	2022
Melanie Stansbury (United States House of Representatives)	\$500	2021
Marcus Montoya (New Mexico 8th Judicial District Attorney)	\$500	2020
Laura Childress (New Mexico State House of Representatives)	\$250	2020
Paul Baca (New Mexico State House of Representatives)	\$500	2019

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. Please provide the Committee with all listed publications via email or other digital format and 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>
Republican lies helped defeat us in 2020. We're going to shield House Democrats in 2022.	USA Today	04/05/2021
On Trying, Winning, and Failing	Las Cruces Sun News	01/04/2021
My First Year in Congress	Las Cruces Sun News	01/12/2020
House Should Vote on Trade Deal	Albuquerque Journal	12/18/2019
Let the Facts and Truth Come to Light	Las Cruces Sun News	10/10/2019
Water Use and Recycling in Hydraulic Fracturing: Creating a Regulatory Pilot for Smarter Water Use in the West	Natural Resources Journal	2015, Vol. 55, Iss. 2
Introduction	Natural Resources Journal	2015, Vol. 55, Iss. 1
Book Review: Contested Waters, An Environmental History of the Colorado River	Natural Resources Journal	2014, Vol. 54, Iss. 1

(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. Please provide the Committee with copies of all listed speeches/presentations via email or other digital format and 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>
Ag Outlook Forum Plenary	Arlington, VA	2/23/2023

National Association of Counties, Agriculture & Rural Affairs Steering Committee and Rural Action Caucus	Washington, DC	1/11/2023; 1/12/2023
National Rural Health Association	Washington, DC	2/7/2023
White House Lead Service Line Removal Event	Washington, DC	1/27/23
Reimagine Rural Brookings Institute Podcast	Virtual	12/20/2022
National Rural Lenders' Roundtable Annual Conference	Washington, DC	12/08/22
Native CDFI Policy Summit	Washington, DC	12/07/2022
National Rural Housing Coalition	Washington, DC	12/07/2022
Farm Bill Hearing	Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Clip	11/15/2022
National Growers Association Remarks	Washington, DC	10/26/2022
National Rural Lenders Association	Washington, DC	10/18/2022
FCC Chairwoman Conversation Hispanic Heritage Month series	Virtual	10/14/22
NeighborWorks America	Virtual	10/11/22
National Cooperative Business Association Impact Awards	Virtual	10/6/22
OECD Conference Panels on resiliency, Ukraine, and inflation	Cavan, Ireland	9/28 – 9/29/2022
National Rural Water Association WaterPro Convergence	National Harbor, MD	9/26/2022

International Economic Development Council Annual Conference Plenary	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	9/20/2022
TechTank Podcast (Brookings Institute)	Virtual (recorded) Clip	9/19/22
Broadband Hearing	House Committee on Agriculture Clip	9/15/2022
Midwest Council Ag Forum	Detroit Lakes, MN	8/22/2022
LaRue Ag County Agstrvaganza	Hodgenville, KY	8/13/2022
RCAP National Conference	Columbus, Ohio	8/16/2022
IBWC Drought Forum	McAllen, TX	7/27/2022
FAHE Housing Forum	Virtual Clip	7/21/2022
South Dakota Native CDFI Homeownership Coalition	Virtual	7/21/22
Habitat for Humanity	Virtual Clip	7/20/2022
Rural Round Table	House Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth Clip	7/8/2022
NRECA Fiber Connect 2022: Bridging the Digital Divide	Nashville, Tennessee	6/13/2022
Opportunity Finance Network Opening Remarks	Berea, Kentucky	6/7/2022
North Alabama Broadband Status Conference	Hanceville, Alabama	6/6/2022
Housing Hearing	Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, Subcommittee on Housing,	5/25/2022

	Transportation, and Community Development Clip	
Rural Assembly Everywhere	Virtual Clip	5/19/2022
Western Governors Association, Western Prosperity Roundtable	Oklahoma City, OK	5/18/2022
USDA and HHS, Sustainable Livelihoods and Behavioral Health: Strategies and Partnerships to Address Farm Stress and Suicide	Virtual	5/17/2022
Rural Partners of Michigan	Thompsonville, MI	5/17/2022
National Association of Towns and Townships	Virtual	5/11/2022
Small Business Majority, Resilience and Recovery: Supporting America's Women Entrepreneurs Panel	Virtual	5/11/2022
National Cooperative Business Association Farm Bill Summit	Washington, DC	5/11/2022
Western New Mexico University Commencement Speech	Silver City, NM	5/6/2022
FedInsider and the George Washington University Center for Excellence in Public Leadership: Utilizing IIJA Funds for Effective Use Throughout the Nation	Virtual	5/4/2022
2022 United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Inaugural 2022 Energy Summit	Albuquerque, NM	4/22/2022
Urban Institute, Building Rural and Native Communities' Resilience to Disasters	Virtual Clip	4/19/2022
Concordia Lexington Summit	Lexington, KY Clip	4/7/2022

AgriPulse Webinar, Rural renaissance: How investments in transmission modernization can drive rural economic development	Virtual	4/7/2022
Energy Hearing	House Committee on Agriculture Clip	4/5/2022
Care Economy Hearing	Senate Agriculture Nutrition, & Forestry Committee	3/22/2022
National Health IT Collaborative for the Underserved	Virtual, Conference held in Orlando, Florida	3/15/2022
National Association of Development Organizations	Arlington, VA	3/14/2022
National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Annual Conference	Nashville, TN	3/9/2022
Farm Bill Hearing	House Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit	3/8/2022
Cornell University Q&A with students	Ithaca, NY	3/3/2022
Ag Outlook Forum	Virtual	2/24/2022; 2/25/2022
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Plenary	Arlington, VA	2/16/2022
Native CDFI Network Annual Summit	Washington, DC	2/16/2022
NACo Ag and Rural Affairs Steering Committee Address	Washington, DC	2/12/2022
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives Annual Meeting Address	Phoenix, AZ	2/9/2022
Department of Interior and White House Interagency Group on Insular Affairs	Washington, DC	2/1/2022
American Association of Community Colleges	Jacksonville, FL	1/28/2022

Urban Institute	Virtual	1/14/2022
White House National Economic Council – International Economic Development Council Forum	Washington, DC	12/9/2021
Rural Maryland Council	Annapolis, MD	12/1/2021
National Rural Lenders Roundtable	Washington, DC	12/1/2021
National Rural Housing Coalition	Washington, DC	11/15/21
Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Network	Washington, DC	11/15/21
National Association of Counties Ag & Rural Affairs Steering Committee	Virtual	11/22/21
National Rural Lenders Fireside Chat	Washington, DC	10/26/2021
Confirmation Hearing	Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry Committee Clip	7/29/2021
Eastern New Mexico Governmental Forum; panel participant	Zoom Event	6/21/2021
Problem Solvers Caucus News Conference; speaker – COVID-19 relief	Capitol – Washington, DC Clip: beginning at 24:12	12/21/2020
New Mexico 2 nd Congressional Debate	C-SPAN/KOB CSPAN Clip	10/7/2020, 10/9/2020
Third Way Rural Town Hall; panel participant re: COVID-19 impact	Zoom Event	9/24/2020
New Mexico 2 nd Congressional Debate	KOAT Clip	9/27/2020

International Water and Sanitation Caucus Kick-off Event; speaker, (Co-Chair of caucus)	Zoom Event	9/15/2020
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>Reviewing Federal and State Pandemic Supply Preparedness and Response</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	7/14/2020
Broadband Funding Opportunities for New Mexico Webinar; panelist	WebEx Event	7/8/2020
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>Business as Usual? Assessing How DHS Can Resume Operations Safely</i> ; Chair	Zoom Event Clip	6/16/2020
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>Building a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce to Meet the Homeland Security Mission</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	2/27/2020
National Indian Gaming Association – Winter Legislative Summit; speaker	Washington, DC	2/25/2020
Floor Speech re: USPS Fairness Act	US Capitol, Floor of the House of Representatives – Washington, DC	2/5/2020
New Mexico Association of Counties Legislative Conference; speaker	Santa Fe Community Convention Center – Santa Fe, NM	1/23/2020
Kelly Drye Congressional Forum; keynote speaker on bipartisanship	Washington Court Hotel	1/14/2020
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>17 Years Later: Why is Moral at DHS Still Low?</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	1/14/2019
White Sands National Park Celebration; speaker on rural economy	Alamogordo, NM	12/21/2019

Floor Speech re: O'Halleran amendment to HR 3	US Capitol, Floor of the House of Representatives – Washington, DC	12/12/2019
Remarks for the Committee on Agriculture Member Day	Longworth Office Building – Washington, DC	12/11/2019
Floor Speech re: Esther Martinez	US Capitol, Floor of the House of Representatives – Washington, DC	12/9/2019
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>Promoting Safe and Efficient Travel and Trade at America's Land Ports of Entry</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	12/02/2019
Floor Speech re: National Rural Health Care Day	US Capitol, Floor of the House of Representatives – Washington, DC	11/21/2019
64 th Annual New Mexico Water Conference; speaker	Video message	10/29/2019
New Mexico Infrastructure Finance Conference; speaker	Video message	10/23/2019
Floor Speech re: Health Care	US Capitol, Floor of the House of Representatives – Washington, DC	10/19/2019
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>The Public's Right to Know: FOIA at the Department of Homeland Security</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	10/17/2019
Floor Speech re: Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women	US Capitol, Floor of the House of Representatives – Washington, DC	10/16/2019
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>Oversight of ICE Detention Facilities: Is DHS Doing Enough?</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	9/26/2019
National Tribal Telecommunications Association Summit; welcome speaker	New Mexico	9/16/2019
Remarks for the Committee on Energy and Commerce Member Day	Rayburn Office Building – Washington, DC	7/25/2019

Floor Speech re: Alvin Jones	US Capitol, Floor of the House of Representatives – Washington, DC	6/20/2019
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>Federal Protective Service: Ensuring the Mission is Not Lost in Transition</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	6/11/2019
Remarks for NDAA Markup Defense Community Infrastructure Pilot Program	Rayburn Office Building – Washington, DC	6/7/2019
Remarks for NDAA Markup DOD Mentor-Protégé Program	Rayburn Office Building – Washington, DC	6/7/2019
Remarks for NDAA Markup IPP Pilot Program	Rayburn Office Building – Washington, DC	6/7/2019
Remarks for NDAA Markup PFOS and PFOA	Rayburn Office Building – Washington, DC	6/7/2019
Remarks for NDAA Markup Broadband Access Near Remote or Isolated Bases	Rayburn Office Building – Washington, DC	6/7/2019
Remarks for the Committee on Ways and Means Member Day	Longworth Office Building – Washington, DC	5/28/2019
New Mexico Military Institute High School Commencement; keynote speaker	Roswell, NM	5/23/2019
Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument 5 th Anniversary; keynote speaker	Las Cruces Convention Center – Las Cruces, NM	5/21/2019
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers: Preparing America's Law Enforcement to Protect the Homeland</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	5/16/2019
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>FEMA Contracting Reviewing Lessons Learned</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	5/9/2019

Floor Speech re: Rural Health Care	US Capitol, Floor of House of Representatives – Washington, DC	5/08/2019
Two Nations One Water Remarks	Las Cruces Farm and Ranch Museum	4/17/2019
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>Ensuring Effective Operations: A Review of the Fiscal Year 2020 DHS Management Directorate Budget Request</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	4/3/2019
Oversight, Management, and Accountability Subcommittee Hearing: <i>CBP Workforce Challenges: Exploring Solutions to Address Recruitment and Retention</i> ; Chair	Cannon Office Building – Washington, DC Clip	3/7/2019
Floor Speech re: Shutdown	US Capitol, Floor of House of Representatives – Washington, DC	1/30/2019
Domenici Conference; keynote speaker on regional development	Las Cruces Convention Center – Las Cruces, NM	9/13/2018
Carlsbad Mayor's Energy Summit; keynote speaker	Walter Gerrells Performing Arts Center Annex – Carlsbad, NM	9/06/2018

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).

No.

February 14, 2023

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 Agriculture for 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; 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.

Page 2 of 2

I understand that as an appointee I must continue to abide by the Ethics Pledge (Exec. Order No. 13770) that I previously signed and that I will continue to be bound by it. Among other obligations, I will be required to recuse from particular matters involving specific parties involving my former employer or former clients for a period of two years after I am appointed, with the exception of federal, state, and local government.

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

SECTION 2 – SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT

My spouse is a member of the New Mexico State House of Representatives and receives a per diem for each day the House is in session and those days he attends meetings for interim legislative committees to which he is appointed. In addition, my spouse is employed by the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, for which he receives a fixed annual salary. Pursuant to the impartiality regulation at 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502, for as long as my spouse continues to work for these employers, I will not participate personally and substantially in any particular matter involving specific parties in which I know that either the State of New Mexico or the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance is a party or represents a party, unless I am first authorized to participate, pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502(d).

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 black ink, appearing to read 'X Torres Small', is written over a faint, yellowish rectangular stamp or watermark.

Xochitl Torres Small

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF
GOVERNMENT ETHICS

March 3, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

In accordance with the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, I enclose a copy of the financial disclosure report filed by Xochitl Torres Small, who has been nominated by President Biden 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,

David J. Apol
General Counsel

Enclosures



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

Filer's Information

Torres Small, Xochitl

Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture

Other Federal Government Positions Held During the Preceding 12 Months:

Under Secretary for Rural Development, United States Department of Agriculture (10/2021 - 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/ Torres Small, Xochitl [electronically signed on 01/12/2023 by Torres Small, Xochitl 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 03/03/2023 by Bender, Stuart in Integrity.gov]

Other review conducted by

U.S. Office of Government Ethics Certification
/s/ Apol. David, Certifying Official [electronically signed on 03/03/2023 by Apol. David in Integrity.gov]

1. Filer's Positions Held Outside United States Government

#	ORGANIZATION NAME	CITY, STATE	ORGANIZATION TYPE	POSITION HELD	FROM	TO
1	Shield PAC/Third Way	Washington, District of Columbia	Corporation	Independent Contractor	4/2021	6/2021
2	University of New Mexico School of Law	Albuquerque, New Mexico	University/College	Adjunct Professor	5/2021	7/2021

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

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	Kemp Smith LLP (Defined Contribution Plan)	No			
1.1	John Hancock Multimanager 2050 Lifetime	Yes	\$1,001 - \$15,000		None (or less than \$201)

3. Filer's Employment Agreements and Arrangements

#	EMPLOYER OR PARTY	CITY, STATE	STATUS AND TERMS	DATE
1	Kemp Smith LLP	El Paso, Texas	I will continue to participate in this defined contribution plan, but the plan sponsor no longer makes contributions.	12/2017

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

None

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

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	State of New Mexico	N/A		Per Diem for serving in the New Mexico State House of Representatives	
2	New Mexico Wilderness Alliance	N/A		salary	
3	City of Las Cruces/Public Employees Retirement Association of New Mexico, defined benefit plan	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)

6. Other Assets and Income

#	DESCRIPTION	EIF	VALUE	INCOME TYPE	INCOME AMOUNT
1	Oil and Gas Mineral Rights (Value Not Readily Ascertainable)	See Endnote		Rent or Royalties	\$201 - \$1,000
2	U.S. credit union (cash)	N/A	\$15,001 - \$50,000		None (or less than \$201)
3	U.S. Credit Union (cash)	See Endnote	\$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	Wells Fargo	Mortgage on Personal Residence	\$50,001 - \$100,000	2015	3.5	15 years

9. Gifts and Travel Reimbursements

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

Endnotes

PART	#	ENDNOTE
1.	1	The Consultant Agreement originally provided for April 1, 2021 through August 31, 2022, with a provision for termination at any time by either party. I terminated the agreement, with Shield PAC's agreement, on June 22, 2021. The only payment was made pursuant to the agreement on 4/5/2021.
1.	2	I taught a two credit summer course from May 20, 2021 to July 20, 2021.
6.	1	Mineral interests in Beckham, Green, and Lincoln Counties, Oklahoma, United States of America. Operated by Bracken Operating, LLC, which pays me 3/16 part of its proceeds, with adjustments for costs.
6.	3	My spouse's credit union account was previously below \$1,000, and as such, had been below the reporting threshold. That account recently moved above the \$5,000 reporting threshold. Accordingly, I am reporting my spouse's credit union account on this Public Financial Disclosure Report.

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 (limitations apply for PAS filers); (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 \$415 that the filer, the filer's spouse, and dependent children received from any one source during the reporting period.
- Travel reimbursements totaling more than \$415 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 \$166 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

Title I of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, as amended (the Act), 5 U.S.C. app. § 101 et seq., as amended by the Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge Act of 2012 (Pub. L. 112-105) (STOCK Act), 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 sections 105 and 402(b)(1) of the Act 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(d)(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 13770 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), Suite 500, 1201 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20005-3917.

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May 9, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman:

Please be advised that pursuant to section 101(b) of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978, as amended, 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 January 12, 2023 is correct.

This information is current as of Tuesday, May 9, 2023. This date is within five days prior to the date of the first hearing scheduled to consider my nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Xochtil', followed by a large, stylized flourish that extends to the right.

Xochtil Torres Small

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

MAY 10, 2023

**Questions for the Record
Nomination Hearing
The Honorable Xochitl Torres Small
May 10, 2023**

Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow

If you are confirmed, I look forward to working with you. If confirmed, do you agree, without reservation, to:

1. Promptly reply to any request for information from me or any duly constituted committee of the Congress and provide the requested information?

I agree without reservation.

2. Respond to my requests for data and technical assistance in informing or drafting legislation or implementation of the law?

I agree without reservation.

3. Notify me or my staff in advance of any public announcement of any major changes made by you or within the Department of Agriculture during your tenure?

I agree without reservation.

4. 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 agree without reservation.

Ranking Member John Boozman

1. If confirmed, do you agree without reservation to:
 - a. Reply promptly – with all requested information – to any request from me?

I agree without reservation.

- b. Reply promptly – with all requested information – to any request from other members of this Committee and other Senators?

I agree without reservation.

- c. Respond to my requests for data and technical assistance in informing or drafting legislation, or implementation of the law?

I agree without reservation.

- d. Notify me or my staff in advance of making public any major changes USDA decides to make or major decisions USDA makes during your tenure?

I agree without reservation.

2. Management Challenges and numerous audits by USDA Office of the Inspector General, and GAO have documented USDA's complicated history with proper oversight of programs, improving financial management and reducing "improper payments." In tight budgetary times, every penny counts, but tracking errant payments down and eliminating the problem does not take place in a vacuum, there are "costs and benefits" which need to be balanced. How will your prior experience overseeing large operations inform your agenda? How do you envision handling the issue of firm oversight and slashing improper payments as you oversee management of programs that issue a considerable volume of payments?

As Under Secretary of Rural Development, I oversaw the operations, budget, and oversight work in the mission area. I learned the value of strong communication between program delivery offices, the finance office, and the chief risk office to achieve both program accessibility and proper oversight for fiscal responsibility. For example, I found that some improvements can be made by timing reviews during certain times in the fiscal year to decrease impact on program delivery. If confirmed, I look forward to applying these lessons learned to my work with the rest of the Department.

3. OMB issued a memorandum calling for agencies to "substantially increase meaningful in-person work at Federal offices, particularly at headquarters and equivalents, while still using flexible operational policies as an important tool in talent recruitment and retention." OMB Memorandum M-23-15 (Apr. 13, 2023). OPM recently announced that maximum telework will be removed from the Federal Government's operating status next month, following the expiration of the COVID-19 public health emergency. In light of these OMB and OPM announcements, will you commit to work toward increasing the in-person work of its employees, particularly at FSA and Rural Development offices to provide top-notch customer service to the maximum extent possible?

If confirmed, I look forward to working across USDA to implement this memorandum in a manner that recognizes the various needs at USDA. I will implement the guidance in a manner that continues efforts to increase meaningful in-person work, recruit diverse talent, continue to serve our customers and deliver our programs, recognizing the significant work we have achieved in these areas throughout the pandemic.

4. I believe that in instances where USDA and other agencies, specifically the CFTC, share confidential market data or information with one another, the agencies must take every step possible to ensure the data or information is adequately secured. Market participants trusting their regulators' ability to safeguard data is essential for robust and efficient markets, and for farmers, ranchers, producers, and growers to appropriately manage risk. If confirmed, in your capacity as Deputy Secretary will you commit to working to ensure that USDA has the appropriate controls and systems in place to ensure data and information is secured?

Yes, I commit to do so and will continue to push to ensure that USDA is continually making improvements to our data and security systems to ensure such information is secure and protected.

5. The National Agricultural Law Center (NALC), a unit of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, is the nation's leading source of agricultural and food law research and information. The Center serves the nation's agricultural community, Cooperative Extension Service personnel, state and federal policymakers, attorneys, consumers, and others. While operating on a national scale, the Center conducts objective and scholarly agricultural and food law research and information. It is also a formal partner of the USDA National Agricultural Library (NAL), helping fulfill NAL's mission of "advancing access to global information for agriculture. If confirmed, do you commit to ensure the NALC continues to receive the full support and cooperation from USDA to continue their critical work, as mandated by Congress?

I greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet the NALC Director in Arkansas recently and look forward to further discussions, particularly around how NALC's policy and research expertise may help improve ease of applications. I appreciate the work of the NALC. I recognize the value providing agricultural and food law research and information and commit to ensuring this important work continues.

6. As you know, access to broadband is a critical component for the viability of rural communities. Funding from programs like ReConnect has the power to literally change lives. Currently, millions of rural Americans have no access at all to broadband and we are concerned that unless USDA focuses those resources on these communities, many will be left behind in the digital divide for many years to come. Can you commit that will do everything in your power to ensure ReConnect program funds will not be used to overbuild networks already delivering broadband of 25/3 Mbps, and prioritize truly unserved Americans in our nation's rural and hard to reach communities?

USDA is committed to serving the most vulnerable and unserved rural communities, while recognizing that no community wants to be left in the slow lane. We continue to

give priority to the projects that are the most in need and have the greatest lack of access.

7. Advancements in biotechnology give agricultural producers a significant tool in fighting pests & diseases, increasing yield, producing more on fewer acres, and countless other benefits. Yet for far too long, U.S. livestock producers have been frustrated with: (1) the lack of FDA's regulatory certainty in reviewing these technologies; (2) the idea that FDA would label these innovations or the animals themselves as "drugs"; and (3) the fact that our competitors around the world are actively working to make these technologies available to their livestock producers. The benefits from these technologies have the potential to help reduce methane emissions, protect against devastating animal diseases, and improve animal care practices. USDA and FDA executed a Memorandum of Understanding to help modernize the federal government's regulatory oversight of certain genetically engineered (GE) animals used for agricultural purposes. USDA also published an Advanced Notice of Public Rulemaking seeking the public's comments on how USDA should implement a predictable, science-based regulatory approach that will ensure the safe and timely review of these technologies. If confirmed, how will you support the effort of formalizing a predictable, science-based review of GE animal used for agricultural purposes under USDA's authorities and defend the safety of all agricultural biotechnology products by educating the public, consumers, and our trading partners around the world?

Although not in my purview as Under Secretary of Rural Development, I agree that this technology holds significant promise for agriculture and USDA has significant expertise related to this technology. For example, earlier this month, USDA's researchers at the Agricultural Research Service announced that they, in collaboration with the University of Kentucky, University of Nebraska, and private sector developers, have produced the first gene-edited calf with resistance to a virus that costs the U.S. cattle sector billions of dollars annually. I agree wholeheartedly with you that the U.S. regulatory system needs to be predictable and science-based. I also believe it is important for our regulatory system to align with President Biden's Executive Order on Advancing Biotechnology and Biomufacturing Innovation, taking "a whole-of-government approach to advance biotechnology and biomufacturing towards innovative solutions in health, climate change, energy, food security, agriculture, supply chain resilience, and national and economic security" based on "principles of equity, ethics, safety, and security that enable access to technologies, processes, and products in a manner that benefits all Americans and the global community and that maintains United States technological leadership and economic competitiveness." If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for these principals in the U.S. regulatory approach and look forward to working with you on this matter.

Senator Michael Bennet

1. Drought: Farmers and ranchers in Colorado, New Mexico, and across the West face increasingly scarce water supplies. In recent years, I have heard more stories of Colorado producers being stretched to their breaking point than I ever have. These stories are deeply concerning and show how imperative it is that USDA programs help our producers adapt to a hotter, drier future.

a. Can you share any insight into how USDA programs and investments are being targeted to mitigate drought and climate change impacts, build resilient infrastructure and promote adaptation to climate changed environments?

Coming from New Mexico, and as an attorney who worked on water and natural resources, I know that the availability of water will define our future in the West. While much of USDA's work on drought and water scarcity has been outside my purview as Under Secretary of Rural Development, I have been part of the all-hands-on-deck initiative at USDA to improve drought resilience, which includes the Colorado River Basin. Earlier this year, my colleagues at Natural Resources and Conservation Services released the Western Water Strategic Framework. In Rural Development, I have seen the impacts of emergency water needs through applications for deeper water wells and other projects through our Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants. If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about the work across USDA and providing my knowledge from the West.

b. How do you anticipate these drought investments from USDA helping the Colorado River Basin community conserve the 2-4 million-acre feet that is needed annually to stabilize the Basin between now and 2026? If so, how do you see those investments being applied to assist in meeting those additional conservation objectives by the end of 2023 in a way that avoids unintended consequences, like another Dust Bowl?

Though not in my purview, I know that through the strategic deployment of financial resources, technical assistance, and cutting-edge research, USDA is working with communities to help them adapt to the challenges brought on by a changing climate and water scarcity. I appreciate that the Secretary has worked to convene state agricultural leaders in the West to help tackle this important issue, and if confirmed, I look forward to using my role to assist however I can.

c. If mega-drought conditions continue to worsen as expected in the Western United States, what can Congress do to effectively restore hydrologic function in the headwater regions to lessen the threat of wildfire and other impacts from loss of available water supplies to the communities, lands, and people who rely on it? Specifically, what new or existing programs are needed to build this resilience?

Though this is outside my current purview, and I do not have specific recommendations here, I know that close partnerships and careful coordination is critical to addressing drought resiliency from a watershed level. To affect real lasting change, we must communicate with each other, stakeholders, and farmers and ranchers on the ground. If confirmed, I commit to facilitating that communication where I can and remaining a partner for your work.

2. Mega-wildfire Recovery: In 2020, Colorado experienced our worst fire season in history. The Cameron Peak Fire burned over 200,000 acres across critical source watersheds for over one million people, including the Cities of Fort Collins and Greeley. The East Troublesome Fire burned over 190,000 acres, the vast majority west of the continental divide in collection watersheds for the Colorado-Big Thompson and Windy Gap Projects, which supply supplemental water to over one million residents and over 600,000 irrigated acres of agricultural land in northeastern Colorado. Over three years later, most of these affected communities are still in recovery. The way the Federal government currently funds mega-wildfires is severely inadequate and communities downstream are left holding the bag. In Colorado alone, we still have a \$189 million funding gap for the East Troublesome and Cameron Peak fires. As climate change drives larger, more severe wildfires, it is essential the US Forest Service and the Office of Management and Budget do more to prioritize fire prevention and burned forests and scarred watersheds restoration.

a. If confirmed, how will you prioritize wildfire recovery efforts at the agency?

Although this is currently outside my purview as Under Secretary of Rural Development, as a New Mexican, I certainly know the importance of wildfire management and recovery. I recognize that wildfires are growing larger and more complex and business as usual will not cut it, particularly since in the past two years, USDA issued more than \$1.72 billion nationally in disaster relief for fires, hurricanes, and flooding. Approximately \$120 million of that went to Colorado. As with many areas of the country, I understand funding allocated to Colorado likely did not meet the full needs for recovery. USDA has often seen the total recovery needs outpace disaster relief appropriated, which has forced the Department to prioritize equitable resource distribution across the country.

Meanwhile the Department is also working to reduce the growing risk of wildfires through proper lands management. Although outside my purview as Under Secretary of Rural Development, USDA is very grateful to Congress for providing the resources through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to seed our initial work and put the Wildfire Crisis Strategy in motion. The Wildfire Mitigation and Management Commission, established by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, is working on recommendations to Congress for better delivery of post-fire recovery assets

and resources to help support communities severely impacted by wildfires. The commission is co-chaired by USDA, the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Department of Interior.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to ensure that Congress and USDA have the tools to respond to impacts of fires and other disasters across the Nation.

b. Will you commit to working with me on addressing how our Federal government funds mega-wildfire recovery?

If confirmed, I commit to working with you on mega-wildfire recovery efforts.

3. To prevent mega-fires from happening in the first place, in February, I introduced the Protect the West Act to make a major investment in our forest, grassland, and watershed restoration – one that matches the scale of the challenge.

a. What steps can we take in the upcoming Farm Bill to ensure federal programs meet the challenge of long-term drought and a changing climate?

As a former Member of Congress, I recognize that Congress writes the Farm Bill and USDA has the unique opportunity to provide technical assistance to inform Congress' work. In my travels throughout the country, stakeholders have regularly expressed appreciation that USDA is incentive based and voluntary for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners, and I believe that continues to be important throughout the country. In addition, core to the USDA strategic plan is Climate Smart Agriculture, which is important for agriculture work towards climate mitigation and invests in climate resiliency as well as more, new, and better markets. This work could be considered by Congress as part of a drought resiliency strategy. Although outside my purview as Under Secretary of Rural Development, USDA is very grateful to Congress for providing the resources through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to seed our initial work and put the Wildfire Crisis Strategy in motion. These crucial investments will help USDA reduce wildfire risk to communities, critical infrastructure, and our natural resources, while also supporting other programs on public, private, and Tribal Lands to help mitigate the effects of climate change.

b. What does an adequate financial investment in our National Forest System look like given the increasing severity of the climate crisis?

This question is out of my purview as Under Secretary for Rural Development, but I have asked my colleagues in the Natural Resources and Environment mission area to follow up with your staff.

4. The Inflation Reduction Act included \$1 billion for Conservation Technical Assistance, which can help address critical staffing and capacity needs within NRCS and among partner organizations. This is particularly important to ensure historically underserved producers may access the IRA's expanded funding opportunities. Can you explain some of the challenges or hurdles that you're going to work through to adequately staff up to implement the IRA?

If confirmed, one of my roles as Deputy Secretary would be to support the staff at USDA, of which recruitment, onboarding, and retention is part of that work. As Under Secretary at Rural Development there are similar challenges of succession planning, recruitment, and competition to bring in the next generation of USDA colleagues. Days before my hearing, NRCS shared they had posted a bundled job description to expedite hiring. I am interested in learning from this approach and if we can scale for the various positions needed for IRA implementation and in preparation of retirements expected at USDA. While at Rural Development, part of our hiring plan included engagement with various minority serving institutions, if confirmed I want to continue to lean forward on the work we are doing to engage with our community college and university partners to onboard students and transition them to their fulfilling careers in public service. I also plan to work with agencies to understand their plans and where we can improve processes and systems internally or in collaboration with colleagues across the federal family.

5. Through my conversations with stakeholders in Colorado about forestry projects under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), it's apparent to me that NRCS is applying different policies across different states in their private landowner agreements, some being more flexible than others. Can you commit to me that USDA will use its discretion to ensure the most work can be done with the resources currently available so that RCPP projects in Colorado are effective resources for our farmers, ranchers and foresters?

As Under Secretary of Rural Development, I did not work closely with implementation of the RCPP program, but I understand the importance of making USDA programs as accessible as possible to farmers, ranchers, forest owners and rural people. If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, I look forward to working with NRCS Chief Terry Cosby to learn about your concerns with this program. This administration believes that public-private partnerships with farmers and ranchers can be a powerful way to address and manage natural resource concerns on the ground. There are many programs at USDA that are being streamlined, and through work with stakeholders, improvements are being identified and adopted. Like you, and many colleagues at USDA, we all want to see the most work done with the resources available.

Senator Richard Durbin

- 1) When it can often take hours to drive to the nearest medical provider, hospitals are essential access points of care in rural communities. But these rural hospitals don't just provide critical treatment, they also drive the local economy and can serve as the backbone of their town. Across Illinois and the county, our rural hospitals are facing serious financial hardship. The pandemic pushed many rural hospitals to the brink. In the past dozen years, more than 130 hospitals have shuttered their doors. Today, 51 percent of rural hospitals operate with losses, and 450 are at serious risk of closure. When this happens, jobs disappear, doctors leave, patients are harmed, and the community suffers.

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) provided \$500 million as a lifeline to struggling rural hospitals, through USDA's Community Facilities program. These funds helped to buoy some two-dozen rural health care providers in Illinois.

How, specifically, did the eligible use of funds from this ARP program differ from the eligible uses of funds for the traditional Community Facilities Grant Program? What is USDA's assessment of how the ARP's Emergency Rural Health Care Grant Program, including its broader uses of funds, helped to meet the needs of rural hospitals and communities?

The Emergency Rural Health Care Program (ERHC) provided health care entities with an infusion of much needed cash during the COVID-19 emergency. The program provided grant funding, rather than loan funding, for purposes already eligible under the regular CF program such as equipment and facility improvements. It also expanded the eligible purposes of funding to include reimbursement for lost health care revenue, to cover staffing costs associated with COVID-19 testing and vaccine distribution, and to support regional consortiums' efforts to collaborate on solutions to support regional health care problems. While the ERHC program alone cannot solve the systemic challenges faced by rural health care facilities, the program provided critically needed flexible funding to meet the immediate needs facing these entities. We've seen great success through the program with health care recipients leveraging this funding to replace and modernize outdated equipment, expanded telehealth capabilities, implemented facility improvements to lessen infectious disease transmission, and expanded facility access, including through the purchase of mobile health care units to better serve rural residents.

There are other aspects of the program that allowed it to better meet the needs of rural hospitals and communities than the traditional CF program. It is important to remember that grant funding available through the regular CF grant program is comparatively very limited, often pushing health care facilities through loans to finance their projects rather than grants. In addition to the expanded use of funds, the ERHC program removed some of the limitations found in the regular CF program, such as the "unable to obtain reasonable credit elsewhere" requirement, improving access to resources.

- 2) Currently, on a pilot basis, USDA is able to provide technical assistance to rural hospitals to assist in the management of their financial and business strategies. This program aims to improve rural hospitals' financial and operational performance, helping to prevent closures and strengthen the delivery of care.

Does USDA support maintaining and broadening access to this program to additional needed rural hospitals?

USDA has a current \$2 million co-operative agreement with the National Rural Health Association (NRHA), which builds upon prior and ongoing Technical Assistance (TA) to strengthen the long-term financial and operating capacity of rural hospitals. The current agreement continues to leverage NRHA's long-standing partnership with the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and its rural hospital TA advisory council, comprised of rural health experts, to ensure collaboration and coordination in the delivery of TA.

Rural Development is utilizing TA funds to assist rural hospitals with comprehensive strategic financial and operational assessments, rapid strategic planning, revenue cycle analysis, recruitment strategies, board training and more, depending on the needs of the hospital and its ability to devote the time and resources needed to engage in TA and the implementation of recommendations.

Rural Development has already expanded TA access to all rural hospitals in communities of 50,000 or less. Rural Development supports maintaining and expanding capacity building assistance to rural healthcare providers.

- 3) To meet the urgency of climate change, soil and water quality, and nutrient reduction goals, conservation practice adoption needs to increase exponentially among farmers and livestock producers in the agricultural community. Illinois farmers have communicated to me that many aspects of existing programs at USDA and limited technical support inhibit the adoption rate needed to tackle the characteristics specific to Illinois agriculture.

I applaud USDA's leadership with the climate smart commodity grants. But there are challenges that include non-operator farmland ownership, limits with technical assistance, substantial capital improvements to equipment, and the learning curve associated with transitioning to more sustainably focused practices.

As the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, how would you ensure the Natural Resources Conservation Service and associated farm production and conservation programs provide individual farmers the flexibility needed to implement a true system change and adopt practices that would allow us to achieve the conservation, climate, and water quality goals necessary to address climate change?

This is an important question and I have seen how Secretary Vilsack has spoken about the need to create climate smart commodities that not only achieve vital reductions in

greenhouse gases and improve both water quality and soil health, but also create a new income stream for farmers. As stewards of the land, farmer, rancher, and forestland owner participation in conservation can help address climate change in a number of important ways. If confirmed, I would seek to find ways to further support farmers, ranchers, and forest owners, in partnership with the private sector, to help them achieve cost effective and voluntary conservation and climate practices.

What are your thoughts on proposals whereby farm cooperatives, crop advisors, and trained agronomists outside of Natural Resources Conservation Service who could assist with technical assistance and conservation planning backlogs with the goal of expanding and expediting the adoption of environmental practices among producers?

While I know that staffing challenges exist across the Department, I have not been involved with issues specific to delivery of NRCS programs. Knowing the importance that America's farmers, ranchers, and producers place on protecting our soil and water, I look forward to working with Under Secretary Bonnie and Chief Cosby to learn more about how we can better provide conservation planning.

- 4) Recently, I met with an Illinois farmer who told me he wanted to install a major solar panel array for a 3,600-head hog operation, and benefit from net metering. He abandoned the project, after his rural coop said the power line serving his farm was at capacity, and that the farmer, alone, must pay to upgrade the line, or for any transformers and equipment, to accommodate the new energy generated by his solar panels.

I understand the economics. Distribution infrastructure of an electric coop is jointly owned by its members. They're concerned about an expensive line upgrade paid by all membership, when the benefits are for one person or a single household at the end the line. But, this strikes me as a major structural barrier for a farmer, or a rural household, who wants to install renewable energy or benefit from net metering.

We need to explore how we can help single farm households connect to the grid for net metering in these limited instances that I described. Congress provided an increase of \$2 billion for the USDA Rural Energy for America Program—a program that helps farmers pay for installing solar panels—but distribution lines are not covered. Congress also provided \$9.7 billion help rural electric coops build new power generation and transmission to reduce greenhouse gases—but distribution lines do not appear to be covered. And Congress provided funds for “Section 317 loans” for renewable energy, which also includes loan forgiveness authority.

What is USDA doing to help farm households, who want to invest in net metering, but cannot afford the expensive power line upgrades in these particular instances?

From my experience in Rural Development, I understand that through the Rural Energy Savings Program, the coop could take out a zero-interest loan and relend funds at no more than 5% to the farmer to upgrade the line. The Rural Energy Savings Program is a great way for rural Americans to make the upgrades they need to integrate clean energy

affordably. The nature of our electric cooperatives necessitates that coops and their members work together. The coop can take out the zero-interest loan and the farmer can pay the coop back over time. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to work with you on solutions that better allow for investments in distributed solar and other clean energy solutions.

Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock

1. If confirmed, will you commit to working with me to ensure that anyone who has experienced discrimination in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) farm lending programs and is eligible to receive financial assistance through P.L. 117-169 will be fairly considered for this assistance?

I do.

2. If confirmed, will you commit to working to ensure that USDA engages in effective, responsive, clear, timely, transparent, and proactive outreach and engagement with producers who might be eligible for financial assistance under this program?

I do.

3. If confirmed, will you commit to meeting with producers who believe that they have faced discrimination through USDA's lending programs to hear their stories and experiences, including those in Georgia?

I do.

4. If confirmed, will you commit to working to modernize the USDA's internal and public-facing systems to increase efficiencies and decrease backlogs?

I do.

Senator John Fetterman

1. I want to ask a few questions about USDA's housing programs. These programs are essential, so elderly residents and young families can stay in their communities. Would you agree that USDA addresses the unique needs of rural communities, especially when it comes to housing?

I agree that USDA Rural Development has a unique role and expertise in serving rural people and places. When program and administrative budgets provide sufficient support for program delivery, USDA is well suited to address the unique needs of rural communities.

2. Pennsylvanians use USDA resources to develop more affordable housing. However, my state can't get the most out of USDA programs if staff don't have the proper resources and training. I've heard from project leaders that USDA can't always connect them to all the right programs. How would additional resources for staff training improve administration of existing programs?

In my time as Under Secretary of Rural Development, I have seen how important both training and familiarity with programs are for ensuring we have high-quality customer service in rural America.

3. Based on your experience, does it make sense to include rural housing in discussions about the Farm Bill?

As a former Member of Congress, I recognize that Congress writes the Farm Bill, and USDA has the unique opportunity to provide technical assistance to inform Congress' work.

Currently, while the Rural Housing Service (RHS) is administered within Rural Development and USDA, it is authorized through the Housing Act of 1949. While the Farm Bill updates most USDA programs every five years, RHS has not experienced the same periodic updates, and as a consequence, has several outdated and chunky components for Congress to take into consideration.

4. I'm interested in recent rulemaking on Packers and Stockyards Act for fairness. These rules would go a long way in fighting for underdogs in the livestock and poultry industry, as you have discussed already. I have heard from Pennsylvania producers about enforcement issues at the AMS Packers and Stockyards Division. Will you commit to inspiring a culture at USDA to promote competition and fairness in the agricultural industry?

I agree without reservation.

Senator John Hoeven

1. Historically, the Deputy Secretary has led the Department's Farm Bill implementation efforts. As a former member of Congress, I know you understand the importance of honoring Congressional intent. If confirmed, can we count on you to implement the Farm Bill in a manner consistent with Congressional intent? In the event of any ambiguity, will you commit to consulting with Congress to ensure our intent is followed?

I commit without reservation.

2. Crop insurance remains the number one risk management tool for producers. Over the past few years, we've worked closely with USDA to strengthen and improve coverage for growers. It is critical that we protect the program from harmful cuts that would reduce program effectiveness and integrity. We've worked to include provisions in Ag Appropriations and the Farm Bill to prohibit unnecessary changes or reductions in funding for crop insurance. In recognition of its important role as a safety net for U.S. producers, will you commit to supporting strong crop insurance and rejecting any cuts?

Although crop insurance is not currently in my purview as Under Secretary of Rural Development, as I have traveled across the country, I have heard how important Congress' work to support crop insurance in the Farm Bill is. If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about and supporting the implementation of this critical piece of our producers' safety net and risk management tools.

3. The Deputy Secretary serves as USDA's chief operating officer overseeing the day-to-day functions of the Department and coordinating the activities of mission areas. This is particularly important in the context of sugar policy, which is jointly administered by the Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation and Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agriculture Affairs. The sugar industry supports 151,000 jobs across the country and contributes \$23 billion annually to the U.S. economy. If confirmed, can we count on you to ensure that sugar policy is administered based on Farm Bill requirements and in the best interests of the American farmer?

The farm bill requires USDA to work closely with American sugar producers. If confirmed, I look forward to implementing the sugar program as required by the farm bill.

Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith

1. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has become an increasingly urgent topic in recent years. CWD is a highly contagious, always fatal disease that affects white-tailed deer, elk, mule deer, and other cervids. The first case of CWD in Mississippi was detected in February 2018, and well over a hundred cases have been reported in the state since then. Despite great efforts by USDA, state and local wildlife agencies, and our land-grant institutions, there still doesn't seem to be a proven strategy to eradicate or control CWD. While we don't know much about how to control it, we do know that inter-agency collaboration is required to better understand and manage this disease. Please elaborate on how USDA will continue to work with other federal, state, and local agencies to address chronic wasting disease if you are confirmed.

Although this is not in my purview as Under Secretary of Rural Development, I understand that partnerships are the key to everything we do. In Congress, I was proud to support the bipartisan America's Conservation Enhancement Act, which

established an intragovernmental CWD Taskforce. If confirmed, I will continue our close collaboration with federal, state, local, and industry partners to address chronic wasting disease (CWD).

Senator Charles Grassley

1. Undersecretary Torres Small – if you are confirmed for this position you will sit as the Vice Chairperson for the Commodity Credit Corporation. If confirmed, will you support the creation of any new programs that bypass Congress while Congress is negotiating a Farm Bill?

If confirmed, I commit to ensuring that any uses of the Commodity Credit Corporation fully comply with law set forth by Congress.

2. In April of 2022, USDA updated its policy to implement the return to physical work on May 27, 2022. I know the USDA Rural Development employees in Iowa often do not sit in an office and instead go out to communities to assist with their needs. Still, I hear from many Iowans who have been frustrated with getting adequate customer service from various USDA agencies. As Undersecretary of Rural Development, do you know what percentage of rural development employees are still remote or teleworking now, one year after return to work plans should have been implemented?

Approximately 98 percent of Rural Development's 4,700-person workforce are eligible for flexibility of some kind, while requiring that customer facing offices remain open and accessible.

3. Do you believe that being in-person is an important part of the job at USDA?

Yes. Rural Development has forty-seven state offices with hundreds of additional satellite offices in communities across the country. These provide boots-on-the ground for RD and allow RD employees to meet directly with customers.

Senator John Thune

1. Secretary Vilsack recently testified that the ReConnect Program “does not address the issue of unserved areas” and that the “ReConnect Program as we are currently administering it is focused on existing broadband systems.”

a. Can you please clarify how USDA is currently administering the ReConnect Program?

The ReConnect Program is focused on extending affordable, reliable high-speed broadband service in rural communities that lack access to high-speed broadband service. USDA is working diligently to expedite all funding made

available through our normal appropriations and under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The agency awarded over \$1.6 billion (\$540 million of which was BIL funds) in funds under our 3rd funding window and we are on-track to expend the remaining ReConnect BIL funding under our 4th window.

b. Will any funds go to areas that do not have any broadband service today?

Yes. Under our 4th funding window, applications are accepted for projects in which at least 50% of the households lack access to broadband service. At the same time, priority is given to projects serving communities that have the greatest need and the greatest number of unserved households.

c. How much ReConnect funding goes to providers to upgrade their existing networks to increase speeds available to their customers, and how much funding goes to providers to build new network facilities to unserved locations?

In Round 1-3, the agency required all projects that receive funding to serve areas where at least 90% of households lacked access to high-speed broadband service. Through those three funding windows, the agency successfully awarded over \$3 billion in funds to support projects where at least 90% of households lacked access to high-speed broadband service. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) instructed USDA to make eligible projects where at least 50% of the households lacked access to high-speed broadband service, and that is why our 4th funding window allows projects to apply for funding if at least 50% of the households lack access to high-speed broadband service. At the same time, priority was given to projects serving communities that have the greatest need and the most number of unserved households.

The agency received over \$4.3 billion in applications under the 4th funding window and we are still reviewing the applications which were submitted to determine which projects will receive funding.

2. The most recent round of ReConnect funding opportunity would award funding where half the funding could subsidize areas that already have broadband service. We need to ensure funding goes directly to truly unserved areas. For the awards it made at the 50 percent threshold, does RUS know how many subsidized locations are in areas that already had broadband service from another provider?

In Rounds 1-3, the agency required all ReConnect projects that receive funding to serve areas where at least 90% of households lacked access to high-speed broadband service. The requirement that at least 50% of households lack access to broadband service was taken directly from the language and direction in the Bipartisan

Infrastructure Law (BIL). More specifically, BIL instructed USDA to provide funding provided that:

At least 50 percent of the households to be served by a project receiving a loan or grant from funds provided under the preceding proviso shall be in a rural area, as defined in section 601(b)(3) of the Rural Electrification Act, without sufficient access to broadband.

The agency is still reviewing the more than \$4.3 billion in applications that were submitted in Round 4, so we cannot state today how many projects that ultimately receive funding will serve areas that are entirely unserved and how much funding will go to projects where there is some level of service already available.

3. As you know, USDA's technical assistance is vital as we consider reforms and improvements in the next farm bill. I appreciate the technical assistance USDA has provided on some of my farm bill proposals, but in some cases, it's taken several months to get it. I have a few other outstanding technical assistance requests with USDA – outside of the mission area you currently oversee – that I would appreciate the department's feedback.

a. If confirmed, will you commit to providing more timely technical assistance to help us get a farm bill done this year?

Yes.

b. What ideas do you have for improving the timeliness of USDA responses to technical assistance requests?

As Congress drafts the Farm Bill, the number of technical assistance requests we have received has increased significantly this year, particularly in recent months. In response, the Department implemented a new internal process to improve consistency and timeliness. I look forward to working with you and strengthening communication as USDA works to improve its TA process.

4. We are in the middle of the largest Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, or "bird flu," outbreak in history. According to USDA data, nearly 59 million U.S. birds have been affected so far, significantly contributing to high egg and poultry prices consumers have faced. It's my understanding that USDA has been focused on testing older vaccines developed during the 2015 bird flu outbreak and has not sought to implement newer animal health technologies, like platform vaccine technology, that can quickly respond to new strains and variants.

a. Can you provide an update on USDA's response to the bird flu outbreak?

Although this issue is not in my purview as Under Secretary of Rural Development, I understand that since the first detection of HPAI last February, APHIS has been working closely with its state and industry partners to eradicate the disease from commercial facilities. These efforts are

working. In March, the Department had just 5 detections of the virus in commercial facilities as compared to 50 in March of the previous year. Further, in April, we had just two detections of the virus in commercial facilities compared to more than 100 last April. We know the viral load in wild birds remains high, and we continue to urge states, industry, and individual producers to be vigilant.

If confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of biosecurity, the main tool that has yielded the successful results we have seen so far. We have seen very little lateral spread of the virus from farm-to-farm. Our efforts show that even minor biosecurity efforts can have a large impact on whether the virus impacts a farm. More than anything else, we continue to stress the importance of hardening biosecurity and every producer – from the largest commercial-scale farms to individual backyard flocks – needs to do everything they can to strengthen their biosecurity to keep the virus out.

b. If confirmed, will you make sure USDA is considering all vaccine technologies, including newer and more versatile platform technologies, for testing and approval as appropriate, for potential vaccines to address the bird flu and other animal diseases?

I understand the importance of ensuring we have many tools available to meet the challenges of modern agriculture. If confirmed, I will make sure USDA appropriately evaluates all technologies, especially in light of the devastating impacts that foreign animal diseases can have.

5. What is the status of USDA programs supporting infrastructure investments for biofuels, especially to bring higher blends to market?

a. If confirmed, how will you leverage USDA resources to ensure biofuels are included and promoted in the administration's energy agenda?

In my role as Under Secretary of Rural Development, I have worked on the Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program (HBIIP), which provides grants to fueling stations, convenience stores, hypermarket fueling stations, rail and marine fleet facilities, and similar entities for biofuels infrastructure investments aligned with the administration's energy agenda. The infrastructure investments that HBIIP is supporting are critical to further broaden the availability of renewable fuels like E15, E85, and B20 that help American families save money at the pump while reducing carbon emissions and harmful tailpipe pollution. Given the significant investment in the program through the Inflation Reduction Act USDA is well poised to further expand the use of higher blends of biofuels derived from U.S. agricultural products, while also boosting the availability of skilled jobs with good wages in rural communities. HBIIP complements the biological and economic research, financing, and other biofuels programs and activities across the Department. If confirmed, I

look forward to learning more about how this work is integrated and supporting further alignment with the administration's energy agenda.

6. The EPA has proposed a “Set” rulemaking that is required by consent decree to be finalized by June 14, 2023. I am concerned that the limited increases in proposed biofuel blending volumes inadequately respond to the fact that the biofuels industry is poised to add significant production capacity and new fuel technology in the coming years. The administration had clear justification to set robust blending volumes to ensure this growth is truly additive to the Renewable Fuel Standard, but the proposed volumes may either scare off new investment or displace conventional biofuels that have helped reduce prices and emissions in our fuel supply while also providing a key market for farmers. If confirmed, please explain how you would work with EPA on this and other related matters to ensure that the agency has the most up to date, accurate information, and a more sophisticated understanding of agriculture markets to ensure the administration sets forth an agenda that will not stifle growth or leave new fuel advances or emissions reductions on the table?

While this work is not currently in my purview as Under Secretary of Rural Development, I know how important it is for American farmers and ranchers to have a seat at the table as decisions are made across the federal government. If confirmed, I look forward to representing that voice in federal coordination.

7. Between 2008 and 2020, the Renewable Fuel Standard saved nearly 1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent GHG emissions. The latest research conducted by Environmental Health & Engineering concludes that corn ethanol is 46% less carbon intensive than gasoline. Cellulosic ethanol can deliver greenhouse gas emissions reductions between 70% and 126%. Biodiesel reduces greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 76%. With expanded implementation of climate-smart agriculture practices – such as no-till, cover-cropping, and precision technology backed by USDA - even greater lifecycle reductions are possible. Do you agree that on-farm practices can be modified to further reduce carbon emissions, and do you agree that life cycle emission estimates for biofuels should include these emissions reductions?

There is no question that biofuels, made possible because of American agriculture, can reduce greenhouse emissions and changes in on-farm practices can continue to increase this impact.

8. In March of 2021, I led a bipartisan letter to Secretary Vilsack requesting an update to USDA’s lifecycle analysis for biodiesel before the end of 2021, and in May of 2022 USDA finally replied and said they hope to issue a final report in 2023. If confirmed, will you provide an update on this analysis and ensure USDA will complete this report as soon as possible?

While this question is not directly related to my current role, if confirmed, I look forward to learning more about it. Biofuels remain an important tool in our efforts to

address climate change so the data being gathered will be beneficial to the work internal and external to the Department.

