

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RAMONA E. ROMERO
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY

December 9, 2010

Good morning. Greetings Madam Chair, Ranking Member Chambliss and other distinguished members of the Committee. I acknowledge the many priorities facing this body, and thank you all for your willingness to hold this hearing. It is an understatement to say that it is an honor and a privilege to appear before you as President Obama's nominee for General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture. I am humbled by the trust this nomination represents, and grateful to President Obama and Secretary Vilsack for giving me this opportunity. Should I have the privilege of being confirmed, I look forward to repaying through public service a small portion of the debt I owe our great country for the benefits it has afforded me.

Much is required of those to whom much is given. And I have been given much. First, I have been blessed with a wonderful family and many loving friends. My husband, Blaise Santianni and our daughters Emilia and Adelina are here with me today. I want to thank them publicly for their constant support and encouragement and for their willingness to sacrifice so that I can pursue my dream of public service. Also with me here are several other members of my family and many friends. I thank them all for their support and their presence.

While she was not able to join us here today, I want to acknowledge and thank my mother, Clara Romero. In the late 1960s, she left me in the Dominican Republic and moved to New York City in search of a better life for us. I joined her four years later, when I was about 11. My mother's decision altered the course of my life by making available to me the many opportunities our Nation offers even the most humble of its citizens. I am forever grateful for her courage. Thanks to her -- a humble factory worker -- by the time I reached Barnard and Harvard I had internalized the value of hard work, honesty, courage, perseverance and service. The lessons I learned from my mother's example are ones that I try to live by everyday and which Blaise and I pray will take hold in our daughters.

By now you might be wondering why a Dominican-American raised in New York City wants to serve as general counsel of the Department of Agriculture. The answer is simple: I love to serve others, I love the law, and I love finding solutions to challenging problems. If confirmed, serving as the USDA's chief legal officer will allow me to do what I love. It will also enable me to contribute to the American people the skills and experience I have acquired over two decades as a practicing attorney responsible for a broad variety of complex litigation and commercial transactions, first at a large law firm here in Washington and later at DuPont's well-respected legal department.

Serving America's farmers, ranchers and rural communities appeals to me because they are not only essential contributors to our Nation's economy and the well-being of the citizenry, but also among the most challenged segments of American society. As

Secretary Vilsack noted during a recent television appearance, 90% of our Nation's farmers are barely making it. I want to assure you that, if confirmed, I will approach my duties with an appreciation of the challenges facing our country's farmers and ranchers, rural communities and agribusiness.

As a lawyer who loves what she does, I cannot think of a more exciting place to work than USDA given the challenging and diverse legal issues arising from the Department's broad mission. I have spent most of my career finding effective and practical solutions to tough legal problems. If confirmed, I will spare no effort to do the same at USDA regardless of whether the issue at hand arises from the nutrition assistance programs on which I sometimes depended as a child, or relates to civil rights, competition in the agricultural industry, access to energy, broadband and housing in rural communities, natural resources management, or biotechnology. In short, I am genuinely excited about the prospect of collaborating with the career staff in the Office of General Counsel to ensure that USDA leaders receive timely, intellectually rigorous and sound legal advice and that the legal issues facing the Department are addressed efficiently and expeditiously.

Finally, should you honor me by recommending me and should the Senate confirm me, I will do everything within my power to execute the duties of general counsel with the highest level of integrity and skill, so as to earn your continuing respect and trust. I am committed to working with the leadership of the USDA, in collaboration with Congress, to further the best interests of all Americans who, to varying degrees, are affected by every decision the USDA makes.

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