

**Opening Statement of Chavonda Jacobs-Young, Nominee for Under Secretary for
Research, Education and Economics,**

Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

November 17, 2021

Remarks as Prepared

Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, and members of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in consideration of my nomination. I have served the American people for two decades at the United States Department of Agriculture. It is now my honor to be nominated by President Biden to lead the Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area as Under Secretary. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting Secretary Vilsack to meet the high priority challenges before us.

I want to thank my husband, Arland Young, and my children Autumn and Arland Junior for their unwavering support over the years as I dedicated myself to public service and the mission of USDA.

Most would say this little girl, with her early start in a place called the “Bottom” in Augusta, Georgia, is an unlikely candidate to be here before you today. My mom, Clide Coppin, was a first-generation college graduate of the Medical College of Georgia and a divorced single parent. She taught me, through demonstration and elevated expectations, the value of education, persistence, and hard work on improving my quality of life. She successfully broke the cycle of poverty and ensured that my sisters and I were all college graduates.

My passion for science and fascination with understanding how things work have been constants in my life. From receiving my first chemistry set in elementary school, to running my own laboratory as a faculty member at the University of Washington, and to leading the world’s finest agricultural research institution, seeking solutions to challenges is in my blood.

To get here I’ve had to blaze several new trails. I’m a lot of “firsts”: first African American Ph.D. in the country in my field, first African American faculty member in my department at the University of Washington, and now the first female and first African American Administrator of the Agricultural Research Service.

Being many “firsts” has taught me humility as well as given me strength and confidence. While being the first has been defining thus far, it is more important to me now that I am not the last. That’s why I have a personal commitment to paying it forward and paving the way for others.

Over the course of my career, as I’ve successfully led efforts both nationally and globally, I hope I have expanded the perception of what an agricultural scientist looks like. I am thankful for this opportunity.

I have had the best experience working at USDA! I’ve learned the power of applying collaboration and innovation to pressing agricultural challenges and how to focus in and deliver impactful scientific solutions. The United States is blessed with one of the safest, most abundant, and diverse food supplies in the world. Science and innovation have been key in making it so.

If confirmed as REE Under Secretary, I will bring to the role considerable agricultural research expertise and leadership experience, as well as an unquenchable enthusiasm for the scientific endeavor—which I've had since my mom bought me that first chemistry set. I'll bring my proven background as an innovator and creative problem-solver. And, most exciting to me, I'll bring my commitment to inspire, mentor, and develop the next generation of agricultural professionals.

Thank you for having me here today. I am looking forward to our discussion.