

Mr. Chairman, I have the privilege of introducing Tom Dorr, the President's nominee for Under Secretary of Rural Development at USDA.

Tom is a fourth generation "dirt under the fingernails" family farmer. He has also been a small businessman and understands the demands and challenges of doing business in rural America. And he has been a community leader having served as the Chairman of the Board for the Heartland Care Center, a cooperative care center in Marcus.

Tom was instrumental in starting the Iowa Corn Growers Association and served in various leadership roles there before moving on to leadership at the National Corn Growers Association.

Tom has served on the Board of the Chicago Federal Reserve and has also served on the Board of Regents in the state of Iowa, which is truly one of the most prestigious jobs in our state.

Tom's leadership ability has been demonstrated and utilized to the benefit of his community and our state time and time again.

Tom Dorr is also a family man having been married to Ann for 35 years. They have a son and a married daughter and a beautiful granddaughter, all who are still living in Iowa. He has the same desire that we do as Senators -- to improve the economy in rural America so his family can have all the benefits of the quality of life our great state has to offer.

Tom Dorr has the financial expertise and business savvy required to run an organization as large and complicated as USDA Rural Development. This agency is basically a large bank after all, with a loan portfolio of almost \$90 billion dollars. That is as big as Wells Fargo or Chase Manhattan and bigger than most of the banks in America. This agency has 7,000 employees located in over 800 offices across the country.

Not just any person can move from the farm to take over an organization of this size. But Tom Dorr did run this organization for 16 months - from August 2002 until December 2003. And from the stack of letters I have received, he did it very well. He did it so well that Secretary Veneman retained him as a Senior Advisor when his recess term expired and assigned him additional duties in other areas of the Department of Agriculture.

Because of his recess appointment, we have the unique opportunity to examine his track record. Tom served 15 months as the Under Secretary for Rural Development. I have heard from many people at USDA about Mr. Dorr's accomplishments. This was not only Secretary Veneman, but also from career staff, and groups who originally had concerns. They talk about his leadership, his vision, his intellect and most importantly, his commitment to rural America. When I hear of comments like this from his peers and those who work with him, I take particular note.

Let me describe a few of the results that have been brought to my attention:

No. 1, he expedited the release of \$762 million of water and wastewater infrastructure funds

provided in the 2002 farm bill in just 3 months.

No. 2, he led the effort to complete the rulemaking process in order that the \$1.5 billion broadband program could begin taking applications this year. He believes that if Americans are to live locally and compete globally, that it is as imperative to wire the country for technology access as it was to electrify it over 60 years ago.

3, in order to facilitate the review and announcement of the \$37 million in value-added development grants, he is using private-sector resources to expedite the process.

4, in order to deliver the financial grants authorized through the Delta Regional Authority, he helped develop and get signed a memorandum of understanding between Rural Development and the Delta Regional Authority. This will allow Rural Development to assist in delivering joint projects at no added cost to the Delta Regional Authority.

5, he facilitated the development of a memorandum of understanding, signed by Secretaries Veneman and Martinez, between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Housing and Urban Development that is focused on better serving housing and infrastructure needs.

6, he has developed a series of initiatives with HUD that will allow Rural Development to more cost effectively meet the housing needs of rural America. These have allowed the Department to provide greater access to housing for all rural Americans, but especially minority rural Americans in fulfillment of the President's housing initiative.

7, he has initiated a review of the Multi Family Housing program. This includes the hiring of an outside contractor to conduct a comprehensive property assessment to evaluate the physical condition, market position, and operational status of the more than 17,000 properties USDA has financed, all while determining how best to meet the needs of low income citizens throughout rural America.

8, he has initiated a major outreach program to insure that USDA Rural Development programs are more easily made available to all qualified individuals, communities, and qualified organizations. This marketing and branding initiative has also played an important role in changing the attitude of employees to concentrate on customer service and pro-active outreach, with emphasis on reaching out to minorities.

Although this is an incomplete list of his accomplishments, it is easy to see that Under Secretary Dorr did a great job in the short 15 months that he served at Rural Development.

Clearly, on paper Tom did a great job, but let me read a few comments from the folks that worked with Tom when he was Under Secretary.

First is the Mortgage Bankers Association, a much respected national organization in the banking industry:

"We support Mr. Dorr's nomination as Under Secretary for Rural Development because we

have found him to be an engaged leader with a true commitment to the housing and community development needs of rural America" - Jonathan L. Kempner, President/CEO.

This organization certainly is able to recognize if someone has the ability to understand the financial issues and have the skills needed to run USDA Rural Development.

The next quote is from the Council for Affordable and Rural Housing, a very respected organization serving the housing industry.

"On behalf of our members throughout the country, we are writing to you today in support of the nomination of Thomas C. Dorr to be the Under Secretary for Rural Development...There is a need for strong leadership and determination to forge long-term solutions to preserving this important investment in rural housing" - Robert Rice, Jr., President, Council for Affordable and rural Housing

I have many more letters, probably 50 or more from organizations all across the country asking us to confirm Mr. Dorr. In addition, I have a letter signed by many of the leading national agricultural organizations such as the National Corn Growers Association and American Farm Bureau Federation.

There is another issue that I feel compelled to address today. During the 2002 Hearing and in the floor debate in the Senate, concerns were expressed regarding Tom's position on minority issues. I would like to reference letters for the record this morning that should alleviate any lingering concerns.

I have several letters from minority organization leaders expressing their support for Tom Dorr's confirmation. The first letter is from the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. You may recall that they had a representative testify against Mr. Dorr at the 2002 Hearing. Let me read from the letter I received from their Executive Director:

"I am personally endorsing Tom Dorr's nomination because of his deep interest in rural development. He has made several visits to the communities within the Federation's network and has a great understanding of the needs of rural poor communities. He is the man for the job" - Ralph Page, Executive Director, The Federation of Southern Cooperatives

Here is another one:

"Mr. Dorr [has] made great accomplishments in the position and has earned the trust from rural Americans to carry out this mission" - Dexter L. Davis, President, Northeast Louisiana Black Farmers and Landowners Associations.

Here is another one:

"I met Mr. Dorr in Washington, DC when he was serving as the acting Under Secretary for Rural Development and was impressed with his passion for small farmers. Quite frankly, when I first met Tom, I was not expecting him to be particularly supportive of our needs. But over the years that we have worked together, I have found him to be a great ally and a tireless fighter

for the causes that we both support" - Calvin R. King Sr., President/CEO, Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation.

Here is another one:

"We hold Mr. Dorr as a valuable asset to our organization and its future. He is one of the individuals that has played a major role in bridging the gap between the small limited resource and minority producers for our organization and the USDA" - Fernando Burkett, Black Farmers & Agriculturalists Association, Arkansas Chapter.

I have many more letters that I could read, but I think you get the point. Thankfully, these organizations were concerned enough to come forward after they had a chance to get to know and work with him.

With your indulgence Mr. Chairman, I want to also read portions of a letter to Mr. Dorr by Dr. Dennis Keeney, former head of the Leopold Center at Iowa State University. Many of you will recall Dr. Keeney was asked to testify against Mr. Dorr in 2002:

"I write to apologize for appearing at your hearing in 2002. It was something I should have said no to right off, but did not. Then it sort of drug on and I had to go through with the appearance or lose face. That still did not make it right.It was during the reading of this book (The Natural, the Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton) that I realized that I had become part of the mudslinging and character assassination. This is not the type of legacy I would like to leave. You have been misunderstood, and made a poster child for big agriculture. I am sure that has not particularly bothered you. But, I have not been proud of my little part in helping paint that picture" - Dr. Dennis Keeney, Emeritus Professor, Iowa State University, in a letter to Tom Dorr, June 25, 2003.

I thank Dr. Keeney for sharing this letter and for setting the record straight.

In closing Mr. Chairman, I want to ask that this committee set aside the politics of the past and concentrate on the real issues affecting rural America and what Mr. Dorr would do if confirmed for this important job at USDA.

We have neglected our duty by going four years without having a confirmed Under Secretary for Rural Development at USDA. To think that while all of this debate was going on in the Senate, we have had four different individuals serving in the Under Secretary position, and none of them were confirmed by the Senate. That is not a good way to run a business, or a large and complicated agency as important to our states as USDA Rural Development.

Tom has been under a microscope since his original nomination and everyone who has looked in the lense has offered glowing praise for his work and accomplishments. Thankfully we do not need to speculate about whether Tom would do a good job or not, Tom has already demonstrated he has done and will likely continue to do a great job for rural America in the role of Under Secretary.

How often do we actually get to judge a nominee by their proficiency in the job? Tom is a sure

thing. Rural America is regaining its economic, social and cultural momentum. It would be a shame to deprive it of leadership at this critical juncture.

We have a unique second chance here today Mr. Chairman. I hope we will set aside our differences and do what is best for our rural citizens, our states and our country. It is an honor for me to introduce Mr. Dorr to this committee.