

**Opening Statement of  
Chairman Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.  
Hearing with Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
April 14, 2021**

This morning, we are honored to have Secretary Tom Vilsack to discuss his vision for USDA during his second tour at the Department.

Thank you for answering President Biden's call to return to service after having been the longest-serving member of President Obama's cabinet.

You are the first cabinet Secretary to testify before the House Appropriations Committee this year, and we really appreciate your taking the time to be with us, even while you are still settling in and working on your long to-do list. We look forward to hearing your thoughts on key priorities over the year ahead.

Let me also take this opportunity to say thank you for moving quickly to resume assistance payments to farmers and to implement the American Rescue Plan. Swift actions are desperately needed to lift rural America out of the pandemic, especially our small farms and food-insecure populations.

The pandemic and climate change present new major challenges, while obstacles related to access to nutritious food, a stable farm economy, racial justice and developing communities in rural America persist. Addressing these issues while continuing to effectively deliver the services of the Department is certainly going to require a lot of hard work and our best efforts.

While we only have the bare outlines of the fiscal year 2022 budget, we will talk about it. In addition, I am particularly interested in understanding how the American Rescue Plan will feed into ongoing and future efforts at the Department.

I look forward to working with you to build upon the investments that were made in that Act related to rural healthcare, assisting socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and carrying forward the technical assistance, outreach, and education programs to benefit the many groups that your Department serves.

I look forward to working closely with you to advocate for our farmers, ranchers and rural communities.