

## **Rollins Confirmation Statement — 22 January 2025**

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and distinguished Senators of the Committee—

First, my thanks to President Trump for his faith in me to lead the United States Department of Agriculture. His confidence fuels my determination to deliver, and he inspires me through what he's done, and will do, for our great country, including U.S. agriculture.

I also want to thank my dear friends and fellow Texans Senator John Cornyn and Senator Ted Cruz, for so graciously introducing me to this Committee. I've had the privilege of knowing and working with both my Lone Star State Senators for most of the past quarter-century. Senator Cornyn's work defending Texas as our State Attorney General was a major help in our work in Governor Rick Perry's policy shop. Senator Cruz has a heart on fire for liberty and America that was obvious to anyone — which was why we have been friends for over twenty years since first meeting in 2003 ... and which is also why he accepted my offer of a salary of zero dollars in 2010 to found our Tenth Amendment Center at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. He has been a partner and a friend ever since.

Thank you both, from the bottom of my heart, for bringing me here.

I also appreciate the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry for its careful consideration of my nomination. And equally important is the honor to potentially serve the men and women who daily, without pause or complaint, provide our great nation, and the world, with the most efficient food, fiber, and fuel. It is a privilege to appear before you today, and I look forward to your questions.

Throughout the past several weeks, I've met or spoken with all Republican and Democratic Members of the Committee — and I appreciate your insights, your concerns, and your counsel. It is clear we all agree farmers and ranchers are the cornerstone of our nation's communities; they are stewards of the land—the original conservationists—and they are foundational to American life. Yet the demands of American agriculture and the stakes our farmers take have never been higher. When farmers prosper, rural America prospers, and I commit to you today, if confirmed, that I will do everything within my ability to make sure our farmers, ranchers and rural communities thrive.

I also want to thank the many Senators and Representatives on Capitol Hill with whom I've had the opportunity to work during the last two decades: in my time with Governor Perry, in my time at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, in my various roles in the first Trump Administration, and since 2021, in my role founding and leading the America First Policy Institute. If I've learned anything from our conversations and our work, it's that each of you cares deeply about the American people whom we all serve. I'm excited to see that sentiment moved into action across the coming four years.

Before we begin, I want to take a moment to relay my prayers to those in California facing devastating loss from the ongoing wildfires. I cannot fathom what those families and first responders are going through. Please know, if confirmed, I will continue to deploy the tools and resources of the Forest Service to help in any way appropriate.

I wouldn't be here, of course, without the love and support of my family. My husband Mark and my four wonderful children: Luke, Jake, Anna, and Lily, who have always been with me whenever the country calls — and they know that my work for America is an expression of my love for them. My sisters, Helen

and Ann, and their families, know how much they mean to me. And my mother Helen Kerwin, who raised three girls in a small Texas farm community as a single mother, is the living example who led me to this.

Growing up in the small agriculture town of Glen Rose, Texas — population twelve hundred — is where my own story begins. Then, my world revolved around Future Farmers of America, 4-H, and the endless cycle of hay baling, livestock shows, and rodeo seasons that still constitute the calendar of our days in our corner of Texas. That experience sent me to Texas A&M, where I studied and majored in Agricultural Development and Leadership — and then to helm the policy shop of Texas Governor Rick Perry. It was there where I got my first direct leadership role in big-state agricultural policy. It was an awesome responsibility for a young woman still in her twenties — and I loved it, because I loved Texas agriculture.

I had been in office serving Governor Perry for a few short years when I received a call from Dr. Wendy Gramm, a professor at Texas A&M and the wife of one of the greatest Senators in Texas history, Phil Gramm. A small think tank based in San Antonio, the Texas Public Policy Foundation, needed a new president, and she and her Board colleagues wanted to know if I was interested. I was, and I stepped in the front door on January 1st, 2003 — to discover that the Foundation, operating out of rented office space with a skeleton crew, didn't have enough money in the bank to make the next payroll. What I'd taken on as a policy mission became first an institutional-rescue mission. So I got to work.

We righted the finances and embarked on a steady process of proper staffing. Most importantly, we fundamentally redefined the mission of a think tank: from just having ideas on policy to changing policy itself. I strongly believed that we had a responsibility, as citizens, to engage with an aim to changing Texas and America for the better — and that this responsibility doubled for those of us who dared to call ourselves policy professionals.

That reorientation made its mark. Among our many efforts, we engaged strongly with Texas rural and small-town communities, giving them the voice in governance too often denied to them. My colleagues and I constantly reminded the governing class that those Texans were fundamental to our way of life. We empowered the voices of ranchers at our unsecured southern border, and we pursued successful litigation to defend farmers, ranchers, and landowners against burdensome regulations that would have denied them the full and proper use of their own land.

We changed the game.

Changing the game is exactly why I accepted the invitation to join President Trump's Administration in 2018. Everything that we'd sought to do in Texas those last decades — to make policy for real change for real Americans — was being done in that Administration, and I was honored and excited to be part of it. I joined to run the White House's Office of American Innovation, to serve as the Assistant to the President for Strategic Initiatives, and in 2020, adding the role of Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council.

I was privileged to work with next-level minds and strong hearts for America, all of us sharply focused on the need for change on Americans' behalf. We worked tirelessly for the Americans in the forgotten corners of our country — the small communities, the rural areas — who feed us, clothe us, and provide for us too often without notice or thanks. We pushed back against policies like the misconceived Waters

of the U.S. rule that disproportionately targeted farmers and ranchers in the service of misbegotten ideology. And we developed an agenda for them that remains vital to their success today.

In January 2021, we understood that President Trump's second-term agenda would be delayed, and so — along with champions of liberty like Linda McMahon and Larry Kudlow — I had the privilege of establishing yet another institution of policy leadership, the America First Policy Institute, where I currently serve as President and Chief Executive Officer. The Institute has fulfilled several roles since its inception: it coalesced and helped define the America First ideology that our President returned to the forefront of American civics; it provided a gathering place for the policy and intellectual luminaries of that movement; and of course, it further engaged with and defended the interests of America's farmers and ranchers. On the last count, for example, we worked against Communist Chinese ownership of American farmland to preserve America First agriculture. These are themes I fully expect to execute and build upon at USDA, if confirmed.

The purpose of recounting all this is neither to tout my own achievements, nor to simply recite my biography. I'm just a small-town girl from Glen Rose, Texas, who was blessed with everything God and America had to give — and I have always felt a responsibility to give back. And across each role in my public life, I have been able to showcase my love for America, a focus on the forgotten, a talent for organization, a drive for action, and most importantly, a responsibility to serve.

Thanks to President Trump and to you, I may have the opportunity to bring that level of passion and commitment to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I need not tell you, of all people, that this is surpassingly important, because *agriculture* is surpassingly important to us *as a nation*.

In 1787, Thomas Jefferson wrote to George Washington — then a private citizen and former General, not yet a President — on his vision for the new American republic. He declared that “[a]griculture ... is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals & happiness.”

The attachment of the man with the most claim to be the philosopher of the American Revolution to agriculture was not an expression of mere self-interest, and still less self-regard. Jefferson, after all, for all his prodigious intellect, was never a rousing success as a farmer. But he was a perceptive observer of human nature and “the course of human events,” and he understood that agriculture — the working of the land by the citizen — was something important, unique, and *constitutive* in the life of a republic. Planting and its surpluses were foundational to civilization itself, but when undertaken by free men, they yielded a free republic. Our whole civics was a function of the citizen, his land, his work, and its fruits — and it would stand or fall according to its defense and promotion of that citizen.

All Americans are important. But the farmer, the worker of the land, who makes possible all the others, is the American important to all Americans.

To borrow a phrase beloved of the Chief Executive who presided over the establishment of the United States Department of Agriculture in 1862, free men require free soil to which they may give their free labor. That truth and its defense constitute the fundamental mission and purpose of USDA — and it is the same mission and purpose commended by Jefferson, advanced by Lincoln, and now under the stewardship of President Donald J. Trump.

We must remember that history, and that purpose, because there are straits ahead. I fully recognize that if I am confirmed, I am stepping into this role during one of the most economically challenging

times in American agriculture. With that in mind, I want to share with you some of my key priorities for Day One:

- First, we must ensure the disaster and economic assistance authorized by Congress is deployed as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- Second, we must work with the great men and women of USDA and the stakeholder community to immediately and comprehensively get a handle on the state of animal-disease outbreaks, including H5N1 and New World Screwworm, and do everything possible to eradicate them.
- Third, I look forward to working with this Committee, and with the House Agriculture Committee, to pass a Farm Bill that provides the certainty and predictability our farm families need.
- Fourth, we must immediately reconstitute, rebuild, and revivify the United States Department of Agriculture, responding to the clear needs and desires of the American people as set forth so well by the President of the United States across this historic week. This Department, with its tens upon tens of thousands of public servants across the nation and beyond, must be aggressive, effective, and focused on its core mission of serving *all* American agriculture — and *all* the American people. It must, to borrow a phrase, put America First.
- Finally, we understand that serving *all* American agriculture and *all* the American people means ensuring that our rural communities are equipped and supported to prosper not just today, but tomorrow. This includes exploring improvements to the Department’s rural development programs, demanding strong and steady domestic and export markets for our beautiful agricultural bounty, eliminating burdensome and costly regulations that hamper innovation, ensuring nutrition programs are efficient, and putting in the work to make sure we have a healthy and prepared next generation of farmers, ranchers, and entrepreneurs for the next century of American greatness.

These are just four of my top priorities. I’m excited to continue to explore how we truly unleash the power of U.S. farmers and ranchers together — not just in this hearing, but in my prospective tenure as Secretary.

My aim, after all, is the same as yours: the same that brought you to the Senate, and the same that brought Donald J. Trump to the Presidency —

To serve the people.

And that’s a good place to conclude this statement, I think, because Abraham Lincoln himself remarked that “[t]he Agricultural Department ... [is] the people's Department, in which they feel more directly concerned than in any other.”

It is altogether fitting that, as far as “[t]he Agricultural Department” is concerned, the people’s work begins here, today, with their champions and defenders in the United States Senate.

Thank you.