

The hearing will come to order.

Today, we will consider two nominations for the Commerce Department's U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The President's nominee to serve as Director General of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service is Arun Venkataraman.

For over two decades, Mr. Venkataraman has worked on matters of international trade both in the public and private sectors. He currently serves as Counselor to the Secretary of Commerce, advising the Department on trade and other international economic matters.

And in the Obama-Biden administration he served in the Commerce Department's International Trade Administration.

Mr. Venkataraman holds a J.D. from Columbia Law School, a Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and a B.A. from Tufts University.

The agency Mr. Venkataraman has been nominated to lead exists to create American opportunity abroad, because we assume it will grow American jobs at home.

But, in the past, too often it has meant creating corporate opportunity abroad and loss of jobs, especially union jobs, in places like mine and the Ranking Member's home state.

We welcome you to the committee.

We will also consider the nomination of a key housing expert today to join the senior leadership of HUD.

Damon Smith, the President's nominee to serve as General Counsel at HUD, currently serves as a Senior Advisor to Secretary Fudge.

Mr. Smith is the grandson of a Tuskegee Airman and we're proud to claim him as Athens, Ohio's own – in addition to his wife, Janine, he's joined today by his parents Bill and Charlene, who still live in Athens and worked at Ohio University.

He joined the Biden-Harris Administration after serving as Senior Director of Advocacy and Counsel at the Credit Union National Association (CUNA).

He previously served as the Senior Counsel and Acting General Counsel at HUD during the Obama-Biden Administration, providing legal and policy guidance, and setting the Department's litigation strategy and regulatory agenda.

Before his government service, he was a law professor at both Rutgers and at American Universities. He has also served as an urban planner in East St. Louis, Illinois, and St. Louis, Missouri.

Mr. Smith is a graduate of Harvard Law School and holds a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in urban planning from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

I look forward to both of your testimonies today.