

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF RHONDA N. KEENUM
TO THE COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

FEBRUARY 26, 2004

MR. CHAIRMAN, Senator Sarbanes and Members of the Committee, it is indeed an honor and privilege to come before you as the nominee for the position of Assistant Secretary and Director General of the United States and Foreign Commercial Service.

I am humbled and honored that President Bush would nominate me for this role. And I am eager to take on the challenge.

I would first like to thank Senator Thad Cochran and Congressman Roger Wicker for their kind remarks. Both of these distinguished leaders mean a tremendous amount to me and my family – professionally and personally.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Secretary of Commerce Donald Evans, former Deputy Secretary Samuel Bodman and Under Secretary Grant Aldonas for their support of my nomination.

What makes America the greatest nation in the world is the entrepreneurial spirit of the American people, no matter what your background.

Growing up in Mississippi, I was a first hand observer of the power of that entrepreneurial spirit. My father – James Newman – left public service after almost a quarter of a century to pursue his dream of starting his own business, and pursue it he did – risking limited family savings, stable employment and mom's sanity in the process. His risk and investment some 25 years ago continue to generate precious dividends in the tangible evidence of community jobs, interstate commerce and income that even now – some four years after his death – provides a financial safety net that my family would not have otherwise had.

This story – my story – illustrates the power of small businesses all over this great country. Small businesses create more than two out of every three new jobs and generate about 50 percent of our nation's gross domestic product.

In this time of great change in our domestic and international economies, it is imperative for our government to assist American businesses to obtain access for their products and services in the international marketplace. This is not only the mandate of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service, but also the dedicated focus of its programs and employees.

The Commercial Service's worldwide network achieves this goal every day by linking American suppliers with international buyers; advocating for their best interests with foreign governments; and ensuring a level playing field. The programs and expertise

provided by the Commercial Service are critical to the success of American companies in competing and winning in global markets. I have observed the efforts of Commercial Service employees to assist American companies in often difficult circumstances, and have been impressed with their skills, dedication, and pride in public service.

If confirmed, I commit to a continuous assessment of, and investment in, both the development of innovative trade programs and the complex network that delivers them. My goal will be to ensure that the Commercial Service not only continues to meet the high expectations that our clients have of us, but that we exceed those expectations.

If confirmed, I will look to maximize the synergies we have with state partners – as well as local partners, industry associations, and sister federal partners – to provide companies in all states with access to the tremendous opportunities available to them through exporting.

If confirmed, I welcome the challenge to lead the Trade Promotion arm of the federal government. My two decades of work experience have been driven exclusively by client, constituent and consumer accountability. Those years of managing public relations' campaigns, leading field-based organizations, developing and adhering to complex budgets, building coalitions, and motivating and mentoring staff have prepared me for the myriad of opportunities ahead.

Further, my experience in developing successful strategic marketing and outreach programs will heighten the awareness and value of Commercial Service programs to American companies.

If confirmed, I pledge to conduct myself with unwavering commitment – taking ownership of every action, standing up for the entrepreneurial ideas, like those of my father, and standing by the over 1,600 dedicated public servants that have long made the Commercial Service an organization that leads rather than follows.

If confirmed, I will pursue the stewardship of the Service with energy, integrity, accountability and a diligent awareness that we are here to serve our clients – American businesses.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I also want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to family and friends – I would not be here today if not for you.

I will be happy to answer any questions you might have and welcome your comments.