

Statement of John Bryson

Nominee for Secretary of Commerce

**Nomination Hearing before the Senate Commerce, Science, and
Transportation Committee**

June 21, 2011

Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Hutchison, and members of this Committee, it is a profound honor to come before you today as the President's nominee to serve as Secretary of the Department of Commerce. The American people would feel better about our government if they got to see the bi-partisan way you lead this Committee. If granted the privilege of serving, it is an example I intend to emulate.

I know we all share the same hopes for our nation – stronger job growth fueled by businesses that are more innovative at home and more competitive abroad. It is my firm belief that the Commerce Department can help realize those hopes.

Let me also offer my sincere gratitude to President Obama for his confidence in me. I know I have big shoes to fill. Secretary Locke's work to help more U.S. companies sell their goods abroad and his effort to get Commerce's many bureaus to function as one team have made a difference for our country.

I'd like to introduce the members of this Committee to my wife, Louise, who joins me today. Not only a wonderful mother to our four daughters and a wonderful wife, Louise enjoyed her own substantial business career.

I would also briefly mention our four daughters, who could not be here today: Jane, Julia, Ruth, and Kathleen.

We are part of a family, like so many others, that is the living embodiment of the American Dream. My father was born near Bryson City, in Appalachian North Carolina, but as a boy, the family moved west to become homesteaders in far eastern Montana. After proving up the nearly impenetrable land, however, the Montana drought of the 1920s forced another move, this time to northwestern Washington State. There my dad's father worked briefly as a logger, only to injure himself after just a short time on the job.

The family barely survived the injury to its breadwinner, but my dad, following high school, had the great good fortune of being given the opportunity to be the first in our family to attend college. He was sent off to the University of Washington by a man he worked for, with jobs already set up to allow him to pay his way.

After school and a stint in the FBI during World War II, he joined my maternal grandfather in the Oregon lumber industry, and then, realizing his fondest dream, was able to buy a farm where my parents lived for 40 years.

Trying in some small way to emulate his work ethic helped me get to where I am today.

But my mom's example of service has been an abiding influence too. She taught as a volunteer in Portland's inner city schools, and even though she was many miles from the movement's epicenter, gave to civil rights groups fighting for justice in their communities.

When I graduated law school 42 years ago, my trajectory was clear: first, a federal clerkship, then on to a law firm and billable hours.

Perhaps it wasn't surprising that I joined with friends instead to found the Natural Resources Defense Council.

This was before President Nixon signed the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, a time when Americans could turn on their TVs to see an iconic river on fire. Families in many cities were struggling with dirty water and unclean air. We believe our effort to found the NRDC was a way for us help make our country a little healthier. For me, it was also a chance to follow the example my mother had set.

I'm proud of helping found the NRDC. But a lot has happened in the nearly four decades since. I practiced law. I headed two independent state agencies: California's Water Resources Control Board and its utilities commission. I became a member in a major law firm and then moved into business.

And in 1990, after six years principally as its CFO, I was made the Chairman and CEO of one of the country's largest utilities – Southern California Edison and its parent company, Edison International – sometimes being opposed – and even sued – by the very group I had helped found two decades earlier.

For nearly 18 years at Edison, I measured every day by our success in serving our customers and shareholders.

And it was my experience there that ultimately led to invitations to serve on the boards of other businesses, including Disney and Boeing, where I am the longest-serving board member.

At Edison and in my public sector leadership roles, I confronted crisis. On the water board, it was an unprecedented drought. At the utilities commission, the energy crunch of 1979 and 1980. And at Edison, it was the California energy crisis of 2002.

At each stop, I learned from the remarkable people with whom I've worked.

They taught me the value of teamwork and the imperatives of innovation, creative thinking and relentless hard work in weathering crises.

If confirmed, I will take these lessons with me to the Commerce Department, and I hope to instill in the organization a commitment to not only work as one team across the agency's varied bureaus but with other federal agencies, too. Where there's overlapping responsibilities, working better together will help us advance the President's goals and the Congress' objectives.

The American people expect their government to do more with less, keeping its shoulder to the wheel of a recovery too many are still waiting to feel in their own lives.

Doing that means creating more jobs. And that's what President Obama has asked me to focus on.

In my decades of experience in business, I have created jobs. And I understand what it means to meet payroll.

Importantly, I also know what it means to be regulated from a business perspective. If confirmed, I'm committed to helping simplify regulations that are difficult to understand, eliminate regulations that are ineffective and speed up regulatory decisions so American businesses can have the certainty they need.

It's a cause, like corporate tax reform, that will make America more competitive. It's a cause I know the President cares about. So when I come to him with what I'm hearing from the U.S. business community, I know I'll have an eager audience.

The perspective I've gained in the private sector is a big reason President Obama asked me to serve and brings value to the voice I will have within the Cabinet.

It will also help me reach out to America's business community. They're on the economic front lines every day and, if confirmed, the President expects me to be able to tell him about the challenges they're facing so that this Administration does everything it reasonably can to make it easier for them to create jobs and grow.

If confirmed, it will be an honor to lead an agency that does so much to further that goal.

Commerce can help Americans and American businesses out-innovate the world by fostering entrepreneurship, innovation and scientific discovery; expand exports by promoting American products and enforcing our trade laws; predict climate patterns to give businesses more certainty; ensure the health of our oceans which are the lifeblood of so many communities, and; foster economic development through innovative strategies.

The sheer breadth of what Commerce does is staggering – from NTIA's effort to connect more Americans to high-speed Internet to NIST's role developing standards for the Smart Grid, and from EDA's focus on promoting innovation clusters to the work the Bureau of Industry and Security does keeping sensitive technology out of the hands of those who would seek to do America harm.

It's an agency that works every day to make America more competitive.

At Commerce, I believe that starts with the Department's leadership role in the President's National Export Initiative.

President Obama has set a goal of doubling U.S. exports by the end of 2014 to tap into

the 95 percent of consumers who live outside our borders. Today, just 1 percent of American companies export, and, of those that do, nearly 60 percent export to just one market.

If confirmed, I pledge to build on the work begun by Secretary Locke to help more small- and medium-sized businesses break into new markets – and hold our trading partners accountable so they're giving American companies' products the same access in their markets as we give theirs. Our success will mean more jobs and more business investment.

At the Patent and Trademark Office, significant progress has been made over the last two years. The unacceptably high patent backlog has been reduced by 10 percent, even as patent applications have risen by 5 percent. But there's still more to do.

If America is to take advantage of the extraordinary talent of its people, we have to remove the obstacles in front of its entrepreneurs and innovators – whether in a federal lab or a neighborhood garage. The better able we are to speed ideas from the drawing board to the market, the more likely it is that America will be home to the well-paying jobs of the future.

Finally, improving the employment picture will also mean focusing on the vital work NOAA does in America's coastal communities and its world-class science and services, which support the very foundation of commerce.

I know I've touched on just a portion of what the Commerce Department does. I have much to learn about, and, should the Senate confirm my nomination, I pledge that, as Secretary, I will seek your advice and pursue a collaborative relationship that takes full advantage of your collective expertise.

The American people expect us to work together, especially during a time when so much is at stake and so much is uncertain.

I'm no stranger to handling difficult challenges in difficult times. I have the scars from the lessons learned to prove it.

I am truly excited for the opportunity to work with the employees of the Commerce Department, American businesses large and small, this Committee, and the American people in rebuilding our economy. If granted the privilege of becoming America's next Commerce Secretary, it will be my relentless and abiding charge. I will not rest while there's a lever left to throw.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you again for the opportunity to address your committee. I look forward to your questions.

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