

Statement of Dennis Fowler Hightower

Nominee for Deputy Secretary of Commerce

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

August 5, 2009

Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Hutchison, and honorable Members of this Committee, I come here today with an enormous sense of humility and a deep sense of honor, as the President's nominee to be Deputy Secretary of Commerce.

I want to thank President Obama for nominating me; Secretary Locke for his enthusiastic support of my nomination; and the Members of this Committee and your staffs who were gracious enough to meet with me over the past week.

At this time, I would like to introduce the members of the Committee to my son, Dennis F. Hightower, Jr.; my fiancée, attorney Dori Bye and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Bye; and other relatives, close friends and business colleagues – several of whom traveled great distances to support me here today. My brother, Marvin, was not able to be here today, but he is here in spirit.

My family has long taken pride in our service to America. My uncle, James Daniel Fowler, Jr., was the second African American in the 20th century to graduate from the United States Military Academy. He was one of three members of my family who had the honor to attend West Point. Two other family members are graduates of the United States Naval Academy, including the only African American four-star admiral – my cousin, Paul Reason – who is here today.

My own career began with eight years as a regular army officer that included decorated service in the Vietnam War.

Serving as the Department of Commerce's Deputy Secretary would be a fitting bookend to my 40-year career in the private and public sectors.

I am proud of the work I have done, but also conscious of the extraordinary role my forebears played in making this day possible.

My family's commitment to excellence and education can be traced back to my maternal grandfather and his older sister attending Atlanta University and Morris Brown College, in Atlanta, Georgia, before the start of World War I.

My mother received her elementary, secondary and college education here in Washington, D.C. and went on to teach for 40 years. Her career began in a one-room school house in Huntley, Virginia. She later served as a founder and principal of the U.S. Army's GED programs at Fort Belvoir, Virginia for returning World War II veterans; before concluding her career with 27 years teaching adult night school and elementary school in the then segregated Washington, D.C. school system.

I, along with several of my friends seated here today, are products of that school system.

We became the first full three-year class to graduate from high school following the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Without the nurturing, caring and demand for excellence from the many great African American teachers of our day, I would not be sitting here before you.

Their indelible lesson to “prepare, perform and persevere” guided me during my matriculation at Howard University and Harvard Business School, throughout my military and business career – and finally to this hearing today.

I believe the work I have done over the last 40 years has equipped me to meet the various demands the Commerce Department requires of all its leaders.

During my public and private sector careers, I have lived and worked in Asia, Latin America and Europe. My work has taken me to 87 countries at last count – many with multiple visits. I have run multi-billion dollar consumer products and technology-based companies with activities spanning more than 50 countries. I have negotiated business deals at the highest levels with government representatives and corporate leaders in Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Middle East, post-apartheid South Africa and throughout Asia and Latin America.

This experience deeply informed my teaching at Harvard Business School and my service on the board of directors of some of America’s leading corporations and start-up technology companies.

In short, I think I have developed the necessary skills to help make the Department of Commerce effective in its interactions with American companies large and small.

The Department of Commerce – with thousands of dedicated employees working on everything from climate change, to patents, to international trade – has one of the broadest mandates of any federal agency.

But I believe one issue in particular demands our foremost attention.

We must re-establish the primacy of the United States as the world leader in innovation, creativity and excellence across the global economic spectrum.

There are projections that place the United States in fourth place over the next 15-20 years in terms of consumerism, manufacturing capacity, and the growth of an entrepreneurial base that keeps pace with new global developments and delivery systems. This forecasted outcome, to my way of thinking, is unacceptable.

Countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and China – often referred to as the “BRIC” countries – are now employing aggressive industrial policies reminiscent of Japan’s strategic commitment to the electronics industry in the 1960s.

Today, we find ourselves competing not only with companies of great capacity, but countries intent on establishing dominance in the growth areas of the 21st century.

During recent business travels in India, I was floored by that country's commitment to reinvesting in technology and the implications for the United States. I spent time in Bangalore visiting a veritable who's who of global technology giants. I was struck not only by the technological inroads being made in newly designed, avant-garde factories and laboratories, but also by the fact that this technological revolution was often being led by young men and women under the age of 27. By and large, these young people were not educated in the United States like many of their fathers – at MIT, Cal Tech, or Rennselaer, for example – but at the Indian Institutes for Technology.

If America expects to lead, we must put our best minds on the toughest problems – reforming the way America uses healthcare, consumes energy and educates our children. These reforms, which are being pursued relentlessly by the administration, are absolutely necessary to create long-term and sustainable economic growth and jobs.

I believe that the Department of Commerce is uniquely positioned to lead and support the American companies that create those jobs.

As its name implies, the Department of Commerce plays a crucial role in implementing the administration's bold economic agenda. America depends on the Department for:

- The expeditious granting of patents and intellectual property protection for our established and fledgling companies;
- Bringing broadband and emerging telecommunications applications to underserved and unserved communities throughout America;
- Understanding the effects of climate change on our air, oceans and fisheries and promoting green technologies that could mitigate our climate challenges;
- Identifying where the country's human capital resides through the accurate conduct of census surveys, particularly the 2010 census;
- Ensuring American companies compete on a level playing field around the globe; and
- Ensuring emerging American companies have the resources they need to become the global leaders of tomorrow.

These are but a few of the ways the Department of Commerce is an indispensable ally for America's businesses.

Despite the challenges facing America's economy, we can be confident, thanks to the administration's aggressive response and the resiliency of our workers and business, that "this too shall pass."

Earlier in my career as a McKinsey strategy consultant, the best companies I worked with looked at economic uncertainty as an opportunity to re-set, to right-size, to re-tool, to innovate, and to re-invest in our economy.

That is the opportunity we have right now.

America must now act with a renewed sense of urgency. Our global competitors are neither standing still nor shy about taking action to exert their global economic ambitions. America must demonstrate not only a willingness to take action, but we must put in place the appropriate metrics to help us know when we have achieved the intended results.

As I look at the challenges facing America and the Department of Commerce, I am reminded of a saying that defined the mission of one of the elite fighting forces I was a member of, and that is: "Rangers lead the way!"

Today, the Department of Commerce will lead the way to improved economic growth, enhanced job creation and a brighter future than our past.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, if confirmed as Deputy Secretary of Commerce, it is my intent to work with you in a collaborative manner to develop practical and timely solutions to our nation's economic challenges; and in the process, help rebuild and reinvigorate our position in the world.

I thank you for your consideration of my nomination, and the opportunity to address this Committee. I look forward to any questions you might have.

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