

Opening Statement of David Huitema
Nominee for Director, U.S. Office of Government Ethics

Good morning Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Paul, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today.

I am honored that President Biden has nominated me to serve as the Director of the Office of Government Ethics. I would like to recognize the support I have received from colleagues at the Office of Government Ethics, at the State Department, and throughout the Executive Branch ethics community with regard to my nomination, but also throughout my career as an ethics official and in public service.

I would also like to recognize my family: My wife Carolyn and my sons Owen and Miles, all of whom I love so very much. They motivate and inspire me, and fill me with pride every day. I would like to acknowledge the love and support I have always received from my parents, Jim and Mollie Huitema. They both had careers in public service—my mother as a teacher, and my father working for the federal government. Most importantly, they have always modeled a high degree of personal integrity and a commitment to helping others. I am fortunate to have a wonderful brother, John, and I want to remember my brother Philip, who is no longer with us, and recognize my extended family, including my mother in law and father in law—Pat and Sy Robbins.

OGE's mission has never been more critical, as its work forms one part of a broader struggle against the growing cynicism and distrust that can undermine our democratic self-government. The ethics laws promote integrity in government, requiring that officials' decisions and use of public resources must not be influenced by their personal financial interests, their personal connections and relationships, or by any desire to benefit themselves or others rather than the national interest. Beyond that, the ethics laws recognize the importance of public trust, and they are designed to bolster public confidence in the integrity of the federal workforce.

There is good news: Federal employees do have a strong sense of mission and a desire to do things the right way. There are outliers, of course, which is why OGE supports Inspector Generals, the Department of Justice, and others who investigate and pursue accountability for ethics breaches. But for the most part, ethics officials are in a position to support federal employees in achieving a goal they already share.

There is more good news: Agency ethics programs are full of ethics officials who are smart, earnest, and committed to this cause. I know because I have worked with them. I see OGE's role as providing overall direction, but also partnering with agency ethics

programs and supporting their good work. OGE itself is full of talented and committed officials. In my years leading the State Department's Ethics Office, I have worked with many colleagues at OGE on a wide range of topics. If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed, I would be proud to be part of the OGE team.

While people are the strength of the executive branch ethics program, I am open-eyed about the challenges. The breakdown in trust that I mentioned earlier increases scrutiny of federal employees and the executive branch ethics program. This means we must be ever more effective in supporting employees and deepening the culture of ethics compliance. We must be clear in explaining what the law requires—both to the federal workforce and the public. We must support each other in courageously providing sound ethics guidance, even when it is unwelcome, and in pursuing enforcement of the ethics laws where necessary. As the pace of change in our society and economy picks up, we must be nimble in updating outdated requirements and in providing guidance and an appropriate regulatory structure to address emerging issues. And of course, we must do all of this with limited resources. In his confirmation hearing, the previous Director of OGE noted that “OGE finds itself underfunded, under-staffed, [and] over-missioned”. That remains the case, both for OGE and for many agency ethics programs. And so, as we consider any changes in the executive branch ethics program, we must keep practicality in mind, and seek to leverage support and adopt efficient approaches to the greatest degree possible.

I am open-minded about how best to tackle these challenges. I do believe that my experience managing a complex ethics program at the State Department offers a valuable perspective. If confirmed, I also would rely on the strong foundation and expertise already in place at OGE. I would seek to cultivate an even deeper sense of partnership with the broader executive branch ethics community. And I would welcome input from outside government. I know that many in Congress also have an interest in ethics reform—I look forward to answering your questions today, and I pledge to work with the Congress on these issues if I am confirmed.

Thank you again for considering my nomination.