

# Opening Statement to the EPW Committee

John Fleming, MD

Good morning Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Carper, and distinguished members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

It is indeed an honor to appear before my former congressional colleagues. I thank you for inviting me here today. I also would like to thank President Trump, Secretary Ross, and Acting Deputy Secretary Kelley for the opportunity to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Economic Development in the Department of Commerce, if confirmed.

I am very excited about this opportunity because it allows me to use my broad and deep background as an entrepreneur, military veteran, physician, and former U.S. Congressman to serve the American people.

The mission of the Economic Development Administration (EDA) is to support the recovery of economies across America, including the U.S. territories. This agency helps economically distressed communities move past their previously failed economic circumstances. Even strong economic ecosystems sometimes suffer devastation from natural disaster events such as hurricanes, floods, and forest fires. I am acutely aware of this as my own state of Louisiana, after more than a decade, is still recovering from hurricane Katrina. Just drive down a few key streets in downtown New Orleans and you will see the ongoing regeneration of our infrastructure destroyed by hurricane Katrina.

The EDA helps Americans face economic challenges, and I am no stranger to those challenges, having had a few myself. If I may, I'll share one or two right now:

At age 11, growing up in a working-class home and influenced by my nurse grandmother, I began to have a dream of being a doctor one day. My grandmother convinced me that in America you can achieve whatever you want with hard work. I believed her. However, in the pursuit of my dream, I found obstacles.

My mother became disabled when I was 5, and my father died suddenly just before I graduated from high school leaving a college education in doubt.

Nonetheless, by working part-time and with the help of government loan programs, I achieved my goal of becoming a physician while caring for a family back home. It was not an easy pathway.

I loved my work in medicine. I spent the first 6 years as a U.S. Navy medical officer. Upon finishing my military tenure, I set up a private medical practice in a small town in Louisiana where my wife and I raised 4 children. Along the way I became interested in another quintessential American dream: becoming a small business entrepreneur. In partnership with my brother, I began to open various retail franchised businesses that grew to over 500 employed positions that remain in existence even today. Again, there were challenges. I had to acquire capital. I had to develop management systems. I had to implement leadership accountability and many other things required for developing a successful suite of businesses. I also experienced business reversals just like any business owner.

I believe my grandmother's sage advice is still true today - through hard work, you can achieve whatever you want. It's through my own personal experiences that I appreciate the EDA's mission to assist distressed communities in overcoming the economic challenges they may face.

It is my belief with my background outlined here today, coupled with my strong conviction about the great virtue of our American economic model, that I am distinctly qualified to lead the EDA in its extremely important mission. I intend to help any American who may benefit and qualify from our assistance, regardless of their location or socioeconomic background.

It would be a great honor, should I be confirmed, to continue public service by utilizing all that I have learned and experienced as a former military officer, a physician, an entrepreneur, and a four-term congressman. I will endeavor to assist communities across the country that have suffered economic hardship, helping these communities create jobs for millions of Americans.

I pledge to you to work very closely with Congress with full transparency.

Thank you, again, for allowing me to appear before you. I look forward to answering your questions.