

**Opening Statement of Emory A. Rounds III
to be Director, U.S. Office of Government Ethics
May 23, 2018**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill, and members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am profoundly honored that President Trump has nominated me to be the Director of the Office of Government Ethics. It has been my distinct privilege to serve my country and the American public for more than four decades, as a career Navy officer and later as a civil servant and White House appointee. That I might serve further, as OGE's Director, would certainly be the capstone of my government career.

I have proudly been a member of the OGE team since January 2009, and could not be more pleased to have – if I am confirmed – an opportunity to lead the people who constitute the most dedicated, talented, and professional small agency staff in the Executive Branch. In context with the growing interest in and concerns regarding government ethics, OGE finds itself underfunded, under-staffed, over-missioned, and to a great extent under-appreciated. But, to a person, OGE's staff always performs above any reasonable expectations.

If confirmed, my challenges as Director may be many, but the least among them is any question about OGE's staff and its ability to do its job whatever the environment. Each member of OGE's staff is committed to achieving OGE's mission, whatever it takes to do so, to ensure that OGE continues to provide leadership and oversight of the Executive Branch's ethics program. This nation should be proud of their work.

I have been a zealous supporter of the government's ethics program and its mission to prevent conflicts of interest; fraud, waste, and abuse; and to ensure impartiality throughout my career. I firmly believe that it is better to prevent ethical misconduct than to correct or punish violations after the fact. I strongly believe that it must be Executive Branch leaders who, by example, foster an ethical culture in their agencies not only by themselves acting in compliance with the ethics laws and rules, but also by carefully considering the appearance of their actions, even if permissible. The default must be on the side of "over-compliance" rather than the testing of any limits. In my opinion, the tone from the top is critical to fostering and maintaining a strong ethics culture and a positive tone requires more than mere technical compliance.

If confirmed as OGE's Director, I would take on the critical duty of ensuring that the Executive Branch's ethics laws and rules are followed by calling upon government leaders to protect the integrity of government and strengthen the public's confidence in government decision-making. To that end, one of my immediate priorities, if confirmed, would be to personally meet with as many departmental and agency heads as I can, as quickly as possible, to convey my commitment to, and leadership of, the ethics program. I would impress upon these officials the critically important need for their strong ethics leadership. Further, I would commit to leading the Executive Branch ethics program by working with senior agency leaders, ethics

officials, and the enforcement community to prevent potential ethical lapses, resolve issues that currently exist, and support enforcement when prevention has failed.

Integrity in government must not be simply aspirational. Rather, it must be our mission as senior leaders every day to encourage and foster a culture of government integrity, free of conflicts and dedicated to impartial decision-making. Without impartial and ethical decision-making, government leaders cannot deliver on their important promises, perform their public duties, or serve our country and its people.

If confirmed, I look forward to the opportunity to lead OGE and the Executive Branch in this vital mission.

Mr. Chairman, thank you once more for your consideration of my nomination.