

**U. S. Senate  
Committee on Finance  
November 1, 2007**

**Benjamin E. Sasse  
Opening Statement, Confirmation Hearing**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Grassley, and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you this morning. Thank you too to those of you who either met with me individually or communicated your priorities and policy concerns via your staff members in meetings leading up to today.

I am also deeply grateful for the willingness of Senators Hagel and Nelson, my two home-state senators, to come before you to speak on my behalf. They are dedicated public servants greatly respected by me and by all Nebraskans.

Finally, I would like to thank President Bush and Secretary Leavitt for their confidence in me and for the opportunity to work on important health and human services issues. I have been privileged to work in the Administration on-and-off since 2003, and my last ten months with Secretary Leavitt and his team have been particularly rewarding. As members of this Committee know, the Secretary is a tireless leader and a fundamentally decent human being. Years from now, I have no doubt that I will look back on this period in my life as a time when I not only learned much about policy and management from Secretary Leavitt, but also learned a great deal about treating people with dignity and respect even amid sometimes stressful times.

Before making a very brief opening statement, I would like to take the opportunity to introduce the three most important ladies in my life. My wife, Melissa McLeod Sasse, is present today. And our daughters, Elizabeth and Katherine, ages six and three, are being introduced to the workings of their government today. I am also very glad to have Melissa's parents, my

mother- and father-in-law, Jill and Larry McLeod, with us. My parents, Gary and Jean Sasse and Larry and Linda Shepard, could not be here today, but I am grateful for their loving encouragement and support.

It is an honor to be considered to be Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation at HHS, and it is an Office in which I would be privileged to serve should the Senate deem fit to confirm the nomination.

As members of this Committee know, ASPE serves as the principal advisory office to the Secretary of Health and Human Services on policy development and policy coordination. Its staff and leadership are responsible for major activities in research, strategic planning, program evaluation, and economic analysis. ASPE work product is used by policy-makers across the Executive and Legislative Branches, as well as by researchers and analysts across the country. It has an especially competent and impressive staff and I would be honored to work alongside them and to ensure that the important research and analysis flowing for ASPE's four major divisions get the attention they deserve.

In my academic life, I have long been a student of the Executive Branch policy shops, of which ASPE is one of the finest examples. At the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, where I am on faculty, my dean, Jim Steinberg, is a former head of the policy planning staff at the Department of State from the mid-1990s. Earlier in my career, I was fortunate to spend time in the Office of Legal Policy at the Department of Justice. There I worked on issues surrounding federal, state, and local law enforcement cooperation, the priority targeting of violent crime, and public-private initiatives to ease the reentry of ex-offenders back into law-abiding society post-incarceration. The Executive Branch policy offices I have seen close up have a wonderful pedigree of providing dispassionate, objective policy advice to public

officials regardless of party or ideology – and this is a noble tradition in which I am honored to serve.

In addition to personal experiences and relationships, though, I also have – as a historian by training – a deep fondness for these “blue chip” policy offices because of the vibrant role they have played in American policy-making over the last century. I recognize that we do not have time for historical exploration at this moment, but I would like simply to underline one of the most important of the many insightful aphorisms attributed to Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

Senator Moynihan is best remembered in this room, of course, as one of the distinguished chairmen of your Committee. But years earlier, before his twenty-four years as your colleague, he served in the Johnson Administration as Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy. Based partly on his experiences there, he developed the great quip that “everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but they are not entitled to their own facts.” It is a sentiment I teach my students at the LBJ School and it is a guiding principle that I am happy to report healthily informs the daily work of ASPE.

Should I be confirmed, I pledge to this Committee that I would labor to steward the resources of ASPE to make sure that all policy-makers – regardless of their political perspectives – have available at their finger-tips a wide array of the most important, objective data on the critical subjects before Secretary Leavitt and before all of you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for your consideration. I am grateful for your time, and am happy to respond to any questions you may have.