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February 22, 2021

U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

The 3.1 million members of the National Education Association, who teach, support, mentor, and nurture students in public schools and on public college campuses across America, enthusiastically support President Biden’s nominee for U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack. We urge you to vote YES on his nomination. Votes on this issue may be included in the NEA’s Report Card for the 117th Congress.

When Abraham Lincoln established the United States Department of Agriculture more than 150 years ago, he called it “the People’s Department.” Tom Vilsack understands and appreciates this legacy, and he will work to build on it—just as he did as Agriculture Secretary from 2009 until 2017.

During his tenure, Mr. Vilsack often said that USDA touches Americans every day, in every way. This is particularly true in the realm of food insecurity, which disproportionately impacts children of color. NEA members believe that all children should have access to healthy and nutritious meals daily, regardless of their parents’ ability to pay. When students go hungry, they cannot focus on learning and are therefore deprived of the opportunity to realize their potential. We believe that Tom Vilsack will work to expand the programs families depend on in difficult times, such as SNAP, free and reduced-price school meals, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

We need Tom Vilsack’s leadership at the Department of Agriculture today more than ever, given the toll COVID-19 is taking on families and children. His hearing before the Senate Agriculture Committee underscored his commitment to addressing discrimination in all its forms across USDA agencies and removing all of the barriers to federal nutrition assistance for *anyone* who qualifies for it. Mr. Vilsack understands these challenges, and with his guidance, the department will meet them. We urge you to vote YES on his nomination as Secretary of Agriculture.

Sincerely,

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association