

Opening Statement of Frank T. Brogan
Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
January 25, 2018

Thank you, Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray and Members of the Committee.

First, permit me to tell you what an honor it is to be here today. Following 40 years of public service at the local and state level, the possibility of serving as the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education in the U.S. Department of Education, if confirmed, is both a humbling yet thrilling prospect.

Second, I would like to introduce the two most important people in my life –my wife Courtney Brogan, an attorney by training and the mother of our son, Colby John, who was born 13 years ago next month while I served as President of Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton. I am proud to say that Courtney and I just celebrated our 15th wedding anniversary.

As the youngest of six children, my twin brother John and I never had the chance to know our father. Growing up in a single parent household following his early passing, my brothers, sisters, and I had the great opportunity to be raised by a mother who worked tirelessly to make certain that we were fed, clothed, and most importantly, loved. Perhaps, however, the greatest gift that she provided to all of us was her tremendous emphasis on the importance of our education. She did whatever was required to ensure that all of us took advantage of that education and ultimately had the chance to live, and not just dream about, our share of the great American Dream. So to my entire family, especially my late mother, I say, “thank you for what you have done for me.”

Third, I would like to tell you a little about my career in education and public service. I was a first generation university student. I commuted to the university and worked a multitude of part time jobs while in school. That work, along with the help of financial aid, enabled me to graduate from the University of Cincinnati with a degree in elementary education; a career I had aspired to since middle school.

With my late wife Mary also a newly minted educator, we graduated and began our careers in Florida. I will never forget the first day that I spent as that 5th grade teacher – nervously watching the boys and girls as they quietly filed into their seats that morning. It was an exhilarating yet powerful moment. These were my students and my responsibility. They were children of differing ethnicities, of varying native tongues, economic circumstances and family structures. Their parents were entrusting me with their own children’s safety, learning, and ultimately seeing to it that I contributed to each of their own earned-shot at that same American dream. I set high expectations for all of them, and we worked together to make certain that they could and would rise to those expectations during that school year.

For the next 39 years, I have held myself to those same basic principles of hard work and pursuit of excellence as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, school superintendent, commissioner of education, lieutenant governor, university president, and chancellor of two state university systems. And now, as I make my case to work on behalf of all of America's children and families, I would like to thank the President and Secretary DeVos for providing me the chance to continue engaging in the two priorities which I hold so dear – education and public service.

My time as an educator has been spent helping to fulfill the promise of a nation to our students at every level and help them understand that, if they do their part, they will have the chance to grow up and be everything they are capable of being. My 40 years with students has also been marked by many life changing experiences. Not only has my own life changed, but I have been witness to so many other lives being changed along the way.

I vividly recall watching with over a thousand middle school students from our vantage point just south of Cape Canaveral, the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger and the death of the entire crew, including teacher Christa McAuliffe. As principal, it was up to me to ensure that our school's wonderful teachers could assist those students in processing the tragedy and completing the rest of the day as best we could.

I will also never forget standing near President George W. Bush at an elementary school in Sarasota Florida on September 11, 2001, as a classroom of first-graders proudly read to him until he was interrupted with the news that our country was under attack. I remember, as if it were yesterday, the request he made of me as we later moved to the media center, where he would read a statement to the large group of students, parents and teachers gathered there, followed by a moment of silence for those already lost. His request was offered to someone he knew had spent a career as a teacher, an educator. Specifically, he asked that following his departure, I remain and address the students who had just learned of these events in a way that perhaps, only a teacher might.

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray and Members of the Committee, I hope you can better understand now why my 40 years in education and public service has meant so much to me but perhaps also have a better glimpse into why your consideration of my nomination for this position is such a humbling possibility for me.

Even now as I observe with the rest of the country the Department's efforts to review and approve State plans, I grow more excited at the prospect of being directly involved in the new direction afforded to us by the Every Student Succeeds Act, a powerful piece of bi-partisan legislation. This includes the next critical phase of implementation involving monitoring and support for these plans, and providing strong evidence based technical support to those embracing the challenge to greatly improve the education, and thus lives, of our students.

Please know that if I am fortunate to be confirmed by the Senate, I will remain committed to the same principles which bring me here before you today. Thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to answering your questions.