

Statement of James P. Gfrerer
Nominee for Assistant Secretary, Information & Technology, Department of Veterans Affairs
Before the Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States Senate
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Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Tester, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for your consideration of my nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary of Information & Technology for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I'd like to start by thanking my wife Julie, and our three great kids. They are here today with their love and support for which I'm continuously grateful. Their example and that of countless military and Veteran families and caregivers, give true meaning to Abraham Lincoln's statement and the VA's mission, "to care for him who has borne the battle AND their widow and orphan."

Growing up I was number 7 of 9 kids raised by Depression Era Parents in a middle-class family in St. Paul, Minnesota. Life was good and simple, with a busy life of school, sports, and Church. My extended family consisted of many Veterans — from World War II to Vietnam. In World War II, my Uncles George and Carl served in the Army in Europe. My Uncle Ed was a Marine rifleman landing on Tarawa and combat-wounded on Saipan. His wife, my Aunt Lorraine, was one of the first Women Marines. My Uncle Roger was in the Air Force and Uncle Jim in the Navy in the Korean War era, and my cousin Bobby served as a Marine in Vietnam.

Just short of my 18th birthday, I entered the U.S. Naval Academy, and four years later graduated with a Degree in Computer Science and a commission as a Second Lieutenant of the Marines. Over the next 28 years, I had the privilege to serve in combat and peacetime with men and women from all five Armed Services, but principally leading Marines. From Desert Storm, to Operation Iraqi Freedom, and supporting with teams in Operation Enduring Freedom, it was the privilege of a lifetime for a blue-collar Midwestern kid to serve his country.

Throughout my military service, I had some differential assignments in training, IT, an Office of Inspector General, Corporate Fellow, founder of an Information Operations & Cyber command, and finally in the US Government Interagency at the Department of State. In these positions, the experience gained included understanding the intricacies of IT legacy systems and large scale IT projects, the leadership, both good and bad, in guiding and resourcing projects, and the culture of organizations and importance of collaboration.

Since leaving active duty, I've become a patient of the Veterans Health Administration and customer of the Veterans Benefit Administration. Over the past three years, I've had the unique opportunity to view the VA as one of the 9 million Veterans who use its services. And in the same three years, I've worked as an Executive in the private sector doing IT and Cybersecurity transformation for large commercial clients, further providing me the experience and perspective to serve in the VA.

In the 21st Century we know that Information Technology undergirds all aspects of our life. VA IT has become a critical requirement that is central to the processes and productivity at the VA. Inherently, IT is about business transformation. As such, the business owners play a crucial role of working with IT to

clearly defining the requirements and implement the new system. I have already met with leadership from the Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Benefits Administration, and in these initial meetings, heard their concerns. Within OI&T's Enterprise Program Management Office, there is an Account Management Office that deals directly with the Administrations. If confirmed, they will be a direct priority of mine, including my own interaction with Administration leadership.

IT also requires a talented team of professionals to bring the experience and grit to demanding projects. As Secretary Wilkie stated in his testimony, one of his priorities is to change the culture of the VA. I embrace my role in that effort and will support him fully. In today's employment market IT and Cybersecurity positions are in high demand. People have a choice, and by my example and leadership, the hardworking women and men of OI&T need to feel part of a respected and high-functioning team.

My top three priorities would be a focus on (1) Stabilizing and streamlining core processes and platforms, (2) Eliminating material weakness, and (3) Institutionalizing new capabilities to drive outcomes. To measure progress my intent would be to use a roadmap with a comprehensive balanced scorecard for these broad goals & objectives supporting core internal customers and map to their projects. Finally, my intent is to ensure full measures of effectiveness (MoE) and specific project leads to ensure progress and accountability by office and individual executive leaders.

In closing, Secretary Wilkie also mentioned in his testimony that the Department has been well-resourced and that the time for excuses is over. He has established his priorities and set expectations, and, if confirmed, I look forward to joining the VA Leadership Team and executing his vision.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to appear today, and to be considered for this position. I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.