

Statement of
Thomas G. Bowman
Nominee for Deputy Secretary of the 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, I want to thank you for this opportunity and privilege to come before you and seek your endorsement to serve as the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. I have had the privilege to meet individually with many of you after I was nominated by the President. I have also had the opportunity to work with your staffs over the last two and a half years as the Majority Staff Director for this very important Committee. I have benefitted immensely from your insights and commitment to the health care, benefits and overall wellbeing of our Nation's veterans and their families.

I am deeply honored to have been nominated by President Trump to be the Deputy Secretary of the VA and, if confirmed, being able to return to the VA where I previously served for approximately 10 years both here in Washington, D.C. at the VA Headquarters, and with VA's health care facilities in Florida. I am equally honored for the confidence Secretary Shulkin has expressed in support of my nomination and abilities to make a meaningful difference in the lives of veterans and their families as his Deputy Secretary. Additionally, I would be remiss if I did not note how grateful I am that Senator Burr invited me to return to Washington, D.C. in 2014 to serve on his Committee staff when he was Ranking Member. My presence here today, in all probability, would not have been possible without his confidence and support at that time. Most importantly, I am deeply grateful that Chairman Isakson offered me the honor and privilege to continue to serve this Committee as Majority Staff Director upon his appointment as Chairman in January 2015.

I cannot find words to express my heartfelt gratitude to my wife of 41 years, Joan Bowman, who I know is here in spirit. Joan passed away in November of 2013 after confronting the scourge of ovarian cancer for almost 7 years. I was the caregiver for all of her daily needs for the last 7 months of her life. That experience has provided me a clear and present understanding of the physical and emotional sacrifice that caregivers for our veterans experience daily caring for their loved ones. Joan and I have 3 wonderful children and seven grandchildren all of whom I am sure are watching these proceedings now – daughter Heather Bowman and grandchildren Kirah, Evey, Izak, Phoenix and Bodhi who live in Brunswick, Maine; son and attorney Allen Bowman and his wife Allie, and grandchildren Connor and Kiley who live in Paso Robles, CA; and son Brian and his wife Ryan, both of them are Petty Officers in the Coast Guard stationed in San Diego, CA.

I was raised in a Navy family with parents Leon and Ginny Bowman, along with 4 brothers and 2 sisters. As a family we had tours of duty overseas 3 times during my father's 31 year career.

He retired as a Chief in 1968. My father was at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked on December 7, 1941, and his bombing squadron participated in every major campaign of World War II in the Pacific. When he retired in 1968, he turned to the VA for help, and they did. I retired from the Marine Corps in 1999 and the VA has provided most of my health care needs. I continue to use the VA healthcare system because I trust it. I share this bit of background because it helped shape and has continuously influenced the contours of my professional life in the military and later pursuing public service to benefit our veterans and their families.

If confirmed as Deputy Secretary, Secretary Shulkin has indicated his expectation that I serve as the chief operating officer of the VA. In that role I would be responsible for Executive oversight and management of the daily operations of the Department, both at the Headquarters level and as implemented in the VA's field operations. I believe my past service in the Marine Corps and assignments at the Pentagon witnessing and assisting policy development, and prior VA appointments as VA Chief of Staff and other senior positions within the VA Headquarters have provided me an excellent background and frame of reference regarding the appropriate manner, means and methods of addressing Departmental challenges associated with policy development, program implementation, budgeting, personnel/HR oversight, Congressional relationships and legislative needs of the VA.

Additionally, my years as the Senior Advisor to the Director of VA Healthcare in Florida and the Caribbean provided me an exceptional opportunity to experience, first hand, how decisions and policy developed at the VA Headquarters level are implemented and executed in the field, and at times, not as intended or not at all. Recently, and probably most importantly, I believe my service with this Committee has provided me the opportunity to participate in the inordinately important process of Congressional oversight and legislation affecting, and intended to enhance care and benefits for, our Veterans and their families. If confirmed, I will ensure that the pursuit of my responsibilities as Deputy Secretary will always be assisted by assessing actions and decisions through the lenses of my experience with this Committee.

While there are significant challenges confronting the VA, I believe one of the most pervasive is regaining the trust of Veterans, their families and the American people. The Phoenix VA Medical Center Scandal in 2014 and since then, other scandals associated with an inability to appropriately hold VA employees, senior executives and staff alike, accountable for unsatisfactory performance or misconduct, seriously undermined the trust and confidence in the VA of Veterans and their families, Members of Congress, and the American people. Modernizing the VA as discussed by Secretary Shulkin in recent testimony, working with Congress, VSO's and other stake holders to boldly and aggressively address needs highlighted by each of them, will build upon what President Trump, Secretary Shulkin and the Congress have already started to hopefully regain that trust.

I believe the VA mission at its core is embodied in President Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address in 1865 "...to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan..." Since then, what is meant by "care" (both health care and other benefits) has been an

ongoing evolution as the American people and their Government try to continuously update and address the needs of veterans and their families which arise out of their service and sacrifice in defense of our country. It is clear the American people are committed to maintaining and enhancing the VA. They trust that the President, the Congress, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs will do so by confronting and resolving the challenges collaboratively with the Congress, Veteran Service Organizations, and the outstanding, dedicated, committed and loyal employees of the VA who come to work every day to serve Veterans and their families.

President Trump and Secretary Shulkin have clearly indicated that the continuing evolution of “care” for today’s veterans and their families will be through ensuring that the VA continues its transformation under Secretary Shulkin’s leadership, and as outlined in recent testimony, especially within his 2018 Budget testimony. If confirmed, I will work daily to support that effort. The transformation will ensure that the bedrock goals of providing the highest quality healthcare; compensating and addressing service connected disabilities; providing supportive services and programs that facilitate transition from military service and reintegration into the community; addressing the unique needs of homeless veterans; preventing veteran suicide; and, providing and maintaining a final resting place that honors and respects their service to our Country are maintained.

I, again, want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to answering your questions.