

Statement of Brooks D. Tucker
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary, Congressional and Legislative Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Before the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs

July 19, 2017

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Tester, 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 the Department of Veterans Affairs Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs. I am humbled by President Trump's nomination and the confidence that he and Secretary Shulkin have shown in me.

I would like to recognize my family members who are here with me today. My wife Anita, who has been by my side for over twenty years; my son Forrest, who will soon be a freshman at the University of South Carolina; and my daughter Kate, who is a rising high school sophomore. Their love and support have been invaluable to me.

I was privileged to serve in the United States Marine Corps for twenty years of active and reserve time. From my early days at Officer Candidate School through the Infantry Officer Course, and on various training and combat deployments overseas, the dual role of a Marine leader was always present in my mind: Accomplish the Mission and Take Care of Your Marines. I came to the Senate for the first time as a Marine Corps Congressional Fellow in 2009 and learned first-hand that the leadership traits and principles I lived by as a Marine Officer, were applicable to solve complex problems on behalf of constituents, especially veterans. I enjoyed the work here and eventually decided to return; first as the Deputy Staff Director on the Republican Staff for this Committee, and later as Senator Burr's Senior Policy Adviser for National Security and Veterans Affairs. Those six and a half years as a Senate staffer convinced me the only way you get the really big things done is to build relationships with sincere and like-minded people in both political parties who are committed to accomplishing the mission together. Some of my most rewarding accomplishments of those six years were negotiating significant bi-partisan compromises and solutions for the VA and for veterans. If confirmed, I will bring that same sense of duty, diligence and bi-partisan service in representing the VA before the Congress.

I am firmly committed to ensuring the Administration's priorities for the VA are communicated to this Committee and to the other committees with oversight responsibilities, as well as to any Member of the House or the Senate who requests information or support from the Department. One key observation I had as a Senate staffer was that the VA sometimes lacked a unified voice on Capitol Hill. Secretary Shulkin has recognized the growing need for cohesive and coordinated communication with Congress and a more responsive level of engagement with Members and their staffs. To address that need, he directed the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs to consolidate, effective on July 1, what were previously

separate, but related functions and staffs, in Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Benefit Administration and to fully assimilate them into a unified staff by October 1. If I am confirmed, I pledge that this integrated and proactive staff structure will ultimately better serve the Congress and allow the VA to respond to your inquiries with more efficiency and in a timely manner.

The months ahead will provide a number of opportunities for the VA and this Committee to work together, along with other Committees and Members, to debate and advance the Administration's legislative priorities. My objective, if confirmed, will be to ensure that we have open lines of communication. I want to build on the constructive and positive relationship the Department has been promoting with Congress to meet the needs of our nation's veterans. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I look forward to your questions.