

Opening statement of Sam Brown  
Nominee, Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs  
before the  
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
April 1, 2025

Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Blumenthal, thank you for inviting me to testify before this committee today. Senator Sullivan, thank you for your service in uniform and for your gracious introduction.

I also want to acknowledge and thank my wife, Amy Brown. She is a combat veteran, the mother of our three children, who are also here, and the woman who loved me when I didn't believe it was possible for anyone to see beyond my horrific scars in the months after being wounded. She is more than a spouse. Amy is my best friend and is a hero to me.

I must also thank President Trump for nominating me to lead the National Cemetery Administration. As I hope you will hear and understand through my testimony today, this is a sacred duty and a commitment our nation must uphold to our service members and Veterans who gave a portion or, in some cases, all of their life in service to the rest of us.

It is humbling to be here before you, a committee that leads the United States Senate in bipartisan work that delivers life-changing legislation like the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, the MISSION Act, and the PACT Act. It's equally humbling to be considered as someone who will lead the National Cemetery Administration, which has a legacy of honoring our Veterans and the families it serves with distinction and boasts an impeccable record of customer service.

I am the son and grandson of Veterans. I was raised in a family where we were expected to join the military after high school. My journey down that path began just months after our nation was attacked on September 11th, 2001. I was accepted to the United States Military Academy at West Point and reported for training and my education less than a year after those attacks.

My family members walked that path alongside me. My father, two younger brothers, and my wife all deployed to Afghanistan or Iraq. I lost a soldier as a result of a roadside bomb at the same time I received the wounds that still scar me to this day. I lost friends in Afghanistan and Iraq. I even lost my closest brother to suicide as a result of the unseen wounds from traumatic brain injuries sustained in combat operations over the course of his three deployments to Helmand, Afghanistan.

I've devoted my life to this country and its Veterans, both in uniform and after I was medically retired. I've worked for and with Veterans Service Organizations. I've run a company that provided the Department of Veterans Affairs with emergency or urgent care pharmaceuticals services for our Veterans. And VA has been my primary healthcare provider for the 13 years I've been retired from the Army. As a result, I commit to you that if confirmed, I will always put Veterans and their families at the center of everything I lead.

The greatest lesson I learned in uniform came to me on that fateful day in the desert of Kandahar, Afghanistan, in September 2008. As I lay face-down in the dirt and dust, covered in flames from the top of my head to midway down my legs, I reached a significant point in my life... I finally faced my own humanity and realized that I could not save my own life. Isolated and alone in my own living nightmare, I cried out to my Creator, Jesus Christ, and my mother. I had three thoughts in that moment: I wondered how long it takes to burn to death. I pondered what the transition from this life to the next is going to be

like. And, then I made the conscious decision to give up the will to live. A version of me died in that moment.

I was re-born when I heard the voice of my gunner scream out "Sir, I've got you." After smothering the flames that burned my body, his words gave me the miracle of hope. That hope rescued me and was the start of a journey that brings me here before you today.

That message of hope that I received on the battlefield is one that the National Cemetery Administration delivers every day to the family and loved ones who are left wondering if they can go on with their lives after losing a cherished person who served this country. When that day arrives, the National Cemetery Administration is there to tell these family members and loved ones, "We've got you."

I understand this responsibility and sacred duty, and that's why I sit before you today to ask you to support my nomination to become the next Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

###