

Don Bergin - Opening Statement Before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am deeply honored by the confidence President Trump and Secretary Collins have placed in me to be considered for the position of Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Senator Cornyn, thank you for introducing me today. It was a pleasure to serve alongside you as we worked to improve the lives of our nation's Veterans and achieve the national security and foreign policy goals of our nation. You and Sandy are truly the best of Texas.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Grace, whose unwavering support has made it possible for me to serve in this role. I also want to thank my mother, who served a quarter century as a military spouse, raising three children with strength and resilience—instilling in me the values that guide my public service today.

The veteran community is my community. I view veterans the same way many of you view the constituents of your respective states.

I was born into the Army, just up the street from here at Walter Reed Hospital. The son of a West Point graduate, I was raised among Vietnam veterans. From an early age, I witnessed firsthand the

stigmas and challenges they faced in the community and in seeking care from the VA—struggling with limited access to mental health support, archaic prosthetic services, and a system that often failed to meet their needs. Their resilience shaped my understanding of duty, sacrifice, and the lasting impacts of war.

My family's legacy of service runs deep. Both of my grandfathers served in World War II—one in the Army and the other as a B-17 navigator flying the infamous missions over Germany. My father spent nearly 25 years in the Army, retiring as a Colonel. He is buried at West Point. My sister is a VA physician. My wife, Grace, is a federal employee.

As a military brat, I experienced the sacrifices service members and their families make—moving every few years, making and losing friends, and constantly adapting. Profoundly impacted by the September 11th attacks, I immediately walked into the Marine Corps recruiting office. I was honored to join the first class following 9/11—a diverse group of Americans from Wall Street to Main Street, united by a shared commitment to our country. As an infantry commander, I deployed with the 1st Marine Division during the invasion of Iraq, where my unit helped tear down the statue of Saddam Hussein. I later served two consecutive combat deployments to Fallujah. I was privileged to stand with my fellow Marines, whose courage and sacrifice will always stay with me.

Again, the Veteran community is my community.

I began my service in Congress nearly twenty years ago in the Marine Corps Office of Legislative Affairs, gaining firsthand experience in

how critical congressional engagement is to advance the interests of our service members and veterans.

I went on to serve in personal offices, on congressional committees, and ultimately in Senate leadership as National Security Counsel to the Senate Majority Whip, Senator Cornyn—who was kind enough to provide my introduction today. Throughout these roles, I saw the undeniable truth: when Congress and the VA work together under a common purpose, we can deliver real, lasting results for the Veteran community and their families. Just reference the Post-9/11 GI Bill, MISSION Act, PACT Act, and Elizabeth Dole Act, to name a few. That collaboration must be honest, bipartisan, and always focused on the needs of those who have served.

This experience has prepared me to immediately strengthen that partnership and ensure the voices of veterans remain at the center of every policy and legislative decision.

That perspective is deeply personal. As a patient of the VA, I have witnessed the agency's transformation firsthand — from the struggles of the Vietnam era to the advancements made for the OIF and OEF generations. The progress in mental health care and prosthetic technology has been remarkable, but there is still more work to do. In recognition of veterans' extraordinary service, Congress has committed vast resources to honor our nation's promise to them. We have a shared duty to ensure those resources are used efficiently, effectively, and directly to improve veterans' care and benefits.

When the Secretary asked me to take on this role, I did not hesitate. It offers a rare opportunity to unite my experiences—from the

kitchen table, to the battlefield, and to Congress—to strengthen this critical partnership and ensure the voices of veterans are at the heart of every legislative conversation.

If confirmed, I will be a tireless advocate for veterans, committed to working hand-in-hand with Congress in a spirit of cooperation and shared purpose. Together, we can fulfill President Lincoln's promise, to care for those who have borne the battle.

I will measure every action by a simple standard—am I delivering meaningful results and real accountability for the members of my community who sacrificed so much for this country.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your questions.