

Statement of the Honorable Cheryl L. Mason
Nominee for Inspector General of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Before the
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, distinguished Members of the Committee, I'm honored to sit before you as the President's nominee to be Inspector General at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I am joined today by my husband of 39 years, Brett S. Mason, Lt. Col, USAF (ret), our youngest son, Trevor, and my brother's adult children. Our oldest son, Bryan, could not attend due to work.

Since 1865, when President Lincoln proclaimed our nation's duty was to care for those who had born the battle, their widows, and orphans, our country has made care for our Veterans a tenent. This is the core mission of VA.

If confirmed, I pledge to uphold my lifelong commitment to the Constitution and to VA's mission to care for our veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.

My commitment to those who served this country is deep and personal - as an Air Force veteran's spouse, daughter of a Navy veteran, sister of an Army guardsman, and a proud American. I am one of those survivors and a dependent like those VA serves.

My father served in the Navy during World War II, but he lost his battle with mental health and died by suicide, when I was 4 years old. My family lived in Appalachia and did not know about the benefits and care he could have received from VA.

As I sit here today, decades later, some veterans still don't know about VA services while others wait much too long to get VA benefits and care. This is not acceptable.

I also lost my only brother, an Army National Guardsman, to suicide in 1982; he was 34 years old. My brother's children received no benefits following his death and had to fight to get him recognized as a veteran. This is not acceptable.

It was my mother, a "rosie the riveter" during WWII and a public servant government teacher for 30 years, who steered our family through these challenging times. She instilled in me the value of public service, the importance of the Constitution and the US government, and the impact of making a difference to others and to our Nation.

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My experiences as a military spouse amplified my understanding of the tremendous sacrifice made by the men and women who commit themselves to the defense of this nation. When I became a lawyer, I made it my lifelong commitment to serve veterans and military families. With more than 30 years as a government employee to include 28 years at VA, I have countless hours of service to Veterans and their families as a veterans' law judge and VA attorney.

It was an honor to be nominated by President Trump in 2017, advanced by this Committee under the leadership of Senators Isakson and Tester and confirmed by the Senate to serve as first woman and military spouse Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

As Chairman, I worked closely with Members of Congress and the Senators and staff of this Committee with its a long history of bipartisan commitment and accomplishments on behalf of America's Veterans to address mental health and suicide, increase accountability, and improve access to benefits, care and services through the Appeals Modernization Act, the Mission Act, the Blue Water Navy Veterans Act, and the VA Tele-hearing Modernization Act. I was humbled by Senator Tester's tribute in the January 23, 2023, Congressional Record regarding these accomplishments over my many years of government service.

It is an honor to be nominated by President Trump and considered by this Committee to be the VA Inspector General. I remain dedicated to ensuring Veterans know about and receive the VA benefits, care, and services they earned. I strongly believe that VA must be held accountable to deliver such – our Veterans and their families are counting on it.

I believe my leadership and lifelong experience demonstrate my impartiality, expertise, skills, and judgement to be highly effective Inspector General. My professional legal career provided me with valuable experience in investigations, audits, and inspections – focusing on the facts and evidence and ensuring the proper application and implementation of the law.

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The VA Inspector General plays a crucial and independent role in ensuring the VA meet its mission by promoting efficiency and eliminating fraud, waste, and abuse. Recent reports from this body, OIG, GAO, and others highlight the need for improvements in VA's service to Veterans. If confirmed, I will use the authority provided by law to implement strong oversight and to strengthen programs, policies, and culture at VA.

As Chairman and Veterans' Law Judge, I acted independently from the Department, issuing decisions to be followed by VA and guarding the impartiality of the Board. I created a culture of accountability and service, improved technology, and streamlined processes resulting in more decisions for Veterans and their families.

If confirmed, I will work tirelessly and independently to advance the principles of accountability, integrity, and mission accomplishment at VA on behalf of our Veterans. I pledge to work collaboratively with this Committee, Members of Congress, and Secretary Collins to promote a culture of service to Veterans, to whom we as a nation owe a great debt.

This is indeed a great responsibility. I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that if confirmed, I will uphold this trust on behalf of all men and women in uniform, all who have served, and the American public.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.