

General Eric Shinseki

Opening Statement of  
Eric K. Shinseki  
Secretary-designate of Veterans Affairs  
Before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States Senate  
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Chairman Akaka, Senator Burr, Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs: Thank you for scheduling this hearing so expeditiously. I am honored to be before you today seeking your endorsement to become the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Over the last several weeks, I have had the opportunity to meet with many of you individually and deeply appreciate the committee's concern for and unwavering support for our Veterans and for the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs. I've listened carefully to your concerns and advice, and have benefited from your counsel

I deeply appreciate the confidence of President-elect Obama in this nomination and am fully committed to fulfilling his charge to me -- that is, transform the Department of Veterans Affairs into a 21st Century Organization. I am acutely aware that transformation is a challenging task -- particularly in an organization as complex and as steeped in tradition as is the Department of Veterans Affairs. We faced similar challenges nearly 10 years ago in beginning the transformation of the United States Army. Leadership, commitment and teamwork enable the challenges of transformation to become opportunities to innovate and better serve our Veterans. With your support, I am confident we will succeed.

If confirmed, I will quickly finalize and articulate a concise strategy for pursuing a transformed Department of Veterans Affairs, reflecting the vision of President-elect Obama. I have much to learn about the organization and look forward to gaining valuable input and insights from its civilian workforce as well as from the Veterans Service Organizations. However, three fundamental attributes mark the starting point for framing a 21st Century Organization: people-centric, results-driven, forward-looking.

First, Veterans will be the centerpiece of our organization - our client, as we design, implement, and sustain programs. Our support to veterans and their enrolled family members must go beyond that of servicing customers to a relationship based on trust and positive results over a lifetime. Through their service in uniform, Veterans have sacrificed greatly, investing of themselves in the security, safety, and well-being of our Nation. They are clients, whom we represent and whose best interests are our sole reason for existence. It is our charge to address their changing needs over time and across the full range of support that our Government has committed to provide to them. Equally essential, the Department's workforce will be leaders and standard-setters in

their fields. From delivering cutting-edge medical treatment to answering the most basic inquiries, we will grow and retain a skilled, motivated, and client-oriented workforce. Training and development, communications and teambuilding, and continuous learning will be key components of our workforce culture.

Second, at the end of each day, our true measure of success is the timeliness and excellence of services and support provided to Veterans. Thus, we will continuously strive to set and meet sound performance benchmarks in these areas. Workforce leaders and providers alike will know the standards and perform to them. Our processes will remain accessible, responsive, and transparent to ensure that the many needs of a diverse Veterans population are met. An integral part of measuring success includes assessing cost-effectiveness. As stewards of taxpayer funds, this issue will be central to our quality and management processes.

Third, to optimize our opportunities for delivering best services with available resources, we must continually challenge ourselves to look for ways to do things smarter and more effectively. We will aggressively leverage the world's best practices, knowledge, and technology, which are providing ever-increasing capabilities in health care, information management, service delivery, and other areas. We already know that a portion of today's youth will be tomorrow's servicemen and women, and the next day's Veterans. Thus, we will seek to identify and embed transformational initiatives as part of our culture as we care for Veterans, present and future.

While developing a strategy for transforming the VA into a 21st Century Organization, we will address immediately a set of complex, near-term challenges that face us, as well:

1. Successfully implement the New GI Bill (Post 9/11 Veterans' Educational Assistance Act).
2. Streamline the disability claims system, increase quality, timeliness and consistency of claims processing, and update the Disability Rating Schedule, while maintaining veterans' rights.
3. Ensure adequate resources and access points to meet the health care needs of all enrolled Veterans, as well as those OEF/OIF Veterans and Priority Group 8 Veterans, who will be joining the system.
4. Leverage the power of Information Technology to accelerate and modernize the delivery of benefits and services.

If confirmed, I will focus on these issues and the development of a credible and adequate 2010 budget request during my first 90 days in office. The overriding challenge, which I will begin to address on my first day in office, will be to make the

Department of Veterans Affairs a 21st Century Organization focused on the Nation's Veterans as its clients.

I thank this committee for its long history of unwavering commitment to Veterans. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with you in fulfilling that commitment