

Mr. Robert T. Howard, nominated to be Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology,
Department of Veterans' Affairs

OPENING STATEMENT

MR. ROBERT T. HOWARD
NOMINEE FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFIARS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
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Mr. Chairman, Senator Akaka, and members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. It is indeed an honor to be nominated by President Bush to be the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology at the Department of Veterans Affairs and to appear before you today. I would like to thank the President for nominating me, and Secretary Nicholson for expressing confidence in my abilities by supporting this nomination.

My dedication to the United States Military is marked by a history of service and commitment. In 1963 I left Everett, Massachusetts and entered the U.S. Army, to embark upon a career spanning 33 years. During my time of service I developed a deep respect and appreciation for those who serve in our Armed Forces -- and their families. Personal sacrifice and devotion to duty is routine among members of the military so they deserve our unwavering support both while wearing the uniform and when they transition into the community of veterans. I am privileged to work for them and support that critically important mission stated many years ago by President Lincoln: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan." For me, time has come full circle -- from a long career in active military service to now assisting our nation's veterans through public service.

As you know, I have been the supervisor of the Office of Information and Technology within VA since early May 2006 so I am very familiar with all the work that must be accomplished to form a new, significantly expanded, organization and to also remedy the deficiencies that exist within the area of data security. I am confident that my experience in the US Army, and in the private sector with the Cubic Corporation, has helped hone the skills required to lead the organization effectively and contribute to the successful accomplishment of a wide variety of important tasks.

The reorganization of IT within VA is a major event that will result in more standard processes and better interoperability across the Department. I am totally committed to its successful implementation and improving our performance, not only in the area of operations and maintenance but in developmental programs as well.

The reorganization will assist us in many ways -- including the area of data security where the most difficult work resides -- work that is especially important to our veterans. Secretary Nicholson has clearly stated that he wants the Department of Veterans Affairs to become the gold

standard for all of government in the area of information security. Achievement of that goal involves many activities of the Department but it must involve the completion of all actions associated with the Data Security-Assessment and Strengthening of Controls Program (DS-ASC).

This is VA's high priority program designed to remedy the many security deficiencies that have been uncovered. Because of its importance I've provided the committee staff copies of the action plan associated with this program ? this is a living document that will guide our work. Its successful execution is without question my highest priority. In VA we want to create an environment where veteran and VA employee information is treated with respect and is protected with a high degree of rigor.

I realize the position of Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology will involve very difficult work ? I am fully prepared for this since I know I have the full support of the VA leadership. I also know that you are committed to helping us in any way you can.

If confirmed I will strive to position VA's Office of Information and Technology to be the leader among Federal IT organizations in providing secure, high-quality and responsive service to supported organizations in meeting business needs by leveraging state-of-the-art technologies and building a high performing workforce dedicated to the success of those they serve.

I will continue to remain thoroughly familiar with the issues facing the Department and give my very best effort to work diligently, and to faithfully advise the Secretary and Deputy Secretary and to keep you informed of progress on a timely basis.

With me today are my wife Ciretta, originally from Revere, Massachusetts, and my youngest daughter, Laura Glaub from Woodbridge, Virginia. I am very grateful for their constant love and support and to many other family members and friends whose support has been steadfast for many years.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for your consideration of my nomination. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.