

Mr. Robert J. Henke, Nominee for Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs (Management),
Department of Veterans Affairs

Prepared statement of Mr. Robert J. Henke
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs (Management)
Department of Veterans Affairs

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Mr. Chairman, Senator Akaka, and members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the invitation to appear today. It is truly an honor and a pleasure to be here. This is indeed a very special occasion for me and for my family.

I want to express my gratitude, Mr. Chairman, to you and the Committee for the expeditious consideration of my nomination, and those of my colleagues seated beside me. Having received several of these nominations as recently as this very month, the Committee is now turning its attention to the matter in remarkably short order. I think this is a testament to this Committee and to the absolute importance of the work that the Committee undertakes on behalf of our Nation's veterans.

Over the past several weeks, Members, Committee staff, and personal staff have been more than kind with their time and with their insights into the issues of importance to the Committee. Having served on the Senate staff, I know how precious your time is and how many important issues are on the Senate's agenda. I thank you.

I am both honored and humbled to be President Bush's nominee to be the Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Management, and for the opportunity to testify here today. I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Secretary Jim Nicholson, Deputy Secretary Gordon Mansfield and Chief of Staff Mick Kicklighter for their faith and confidence in me. These gentlemen are inspired leaders, absolutely dedicated to our Nation's veterans. I could not ask to work with finer public servants, and I am energized at the prospect of joining their team.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has, in my view, the most noble of missions: to honor the service and the sacrifice of those who have done so much for all Americans, and to gratefully keep our country's promises to them.

I have had the privilege of wearing the Nation's uniform. My service in the Navy, whether in combat during Operation DESERT STORM, or as a Reservist mobilized for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, is one of the defining chapters in my life. This experience has instilled in me the deepest respect for America's Armed Forces and their unwavering and selfless commitment to mission, to integrity and to service. They are America's best. They are patriots, in the very finest sense of the word. Should I have the privilege of confirmation, I will draw upon this profound respect, and it will provide me with energy, focus and direction.

I believe that I bring valuable skills, experience and perspective to this new and challenging position. I have both private sector and public sector experience with financial management. After leaving active duty, I was with General Electric for three years and completed their rigorous Financial Management Program. I studied public policy and public administration at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. In the public sector, I have experience with federal resource management processes in both the legislative branch and the executive branch. I served for six years on the staff of the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations. Currently, I serve as the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) at the Department of Defense, where I have been fortunate to lead a team of over 190 financial management professionals.

As a nominee, I recognize that I have much to learn about the Department of Veterans Affairs, its important responsibilities and the issues that are of critical concern to veterans. If confirmed, I assure you that I will become fully immersed and tirelessly engaged in these pressing issues, and I will take a proactive, pro-veteran approach in advising the Secretary and Deputy Secretary and in carrying out my duties.

I do not undertake the prospect of these new duties lightly. Secretary Nicholson outlined a philosophy in his confirmation hearing and, if the Senate allows me to serve in this new capacity, I absolutely commit to those very same principles:

- ? veterans should have access to the best available health care in the most appropriate clinical settings, delivered in a timely manner by caring, compassionate clinicians; and
- ? veterans, their eligible dependents, and survivors are entitled to prompt, accurate, equitable and understandable decisions on their claims for benefits; and
- ? veterans should be appropriately honored in death for their service and sacrifices on behalf of a grateful Nation.

I am joined today by my wife Jennifer, and our two wonderful boys, Ryan and Owen. Jen has been my partner, my best friend, and my foundation for almost 16 years. Without her love and support, I simply would not be here today. She knows that public service is both privilege and a responsibility, and fully understands the many sacrifices of this profession, and she encourages me with whole heart at every step of the way.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my parents. While they could not be here today, they taught me, by the power of their example, about the importance of integrity, of faith, and of family. They imbued in me a respect and a love for this country that knows no bounds.

With our Nation at war, this is a critical time and there is much important work to do. I have met many of the impressive, talented professionals in VA's Office of Management, and look forward to working with them and leading them. I am excited at the prospect of joining a team of VA professionals who have dedicated themselves to one goal: serving veterans. I would tell them, and I will tell the Committee this: if I am fortunate to be confirmed, I will do my best. Veterans have done and always will do their best for us; I owe them nothing less in return.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for your courtesy and for the opportunity to be here. I look forward to your questions, and what I hope will be the first of many opportunities to work together on issues important to veterans.