

Prepared Statement of Joshua Jacobs
Nominee to be Under Secretary for Benefits, Veterans Benefits Administration,
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate

February 16, 2023

Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am honored and humbled to be nominated to serve as Under Secretary for Benefits at the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am grateful to President Biden, Secretary McDonough, and Deputy Secretary Remy for their trust in my ability to serve in this important role.

I would like to take a moment to recognize the family, friends, colleagues, and mentors who have supported me. My parents, Richard, and Linda, who taught me to always do my best and do good for others. I want to thank my wife, Julia, and our three kids, Yael, Zev, and Amir. There is no way I could do my job without their endless support, love, and patience. I'd like to also recognize my Grandpa Mel Jacobs - or Papa. He served in the Army during World War II, and later used VA education benefits to pursue his educational and career goals and provide for his family.

I also want to thank Senator Murray - for her kind introduction, for providing me with my first opportunity to work on behalf of Veterans, and for her lifetime of advocacy on behalf of Veterans and their families, which set a standard that I strive to meet every day.

I appreciate how significant the responsibilities of the Under Secretary for Benefits are. The benefits and services delivered by the more than 25,000 talented and hardworking Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) employees, nearly 55% of whom are Veterans, not only help fulfill the promise of a grateful nation, but they also empower Veterans to become homeowners, pursue education and training, and to live healthier and more prosperous lives. For many Veterans, the benefits VBA delivers can make the difference between whether they are able to pay their bills, go to college, or have a roof over their head.

Over the last 15 years, I have dedicated myself to advocating and advancing policies and implementing solutions that help improve the lives of Veterans. I had the good fortune of working for Senator Murray for nearly a decade, where I learned the importance and impact of Veteran advocacy, and the value of pragmatic solutions that ensure government solves problems, rather than creating them. During my time as Deputy Staff Director for the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC), I had the opportunity to work shoulder to shoulder with members and staff from both parties, as well as Veterans Service Organizations, to perform critical oversight and enact legislation that improved benefits and services for Veterans. I understand and deeply respect the dedication and spirit of cooperation members on this Committee demonstrate to get the job done for Veterans. And if confirmed, I – as a proud alumnus

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of this Committee -- look forward to working collaboratively with each and every one of you.

In addition to my work in the Senate, I have had the pleasure of working at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on three separate occasions. During my first tour in VA, I served in the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA), where I learned the importance of open and transparent engagement between VA and Congress. I witnessed how effective engagement and oversight leads to improved outcomes for Veterans. During my second tour, I served as Senior Advisor for Benefits. When I arrived, the disability claims backlog was near its peak, but through collaboration with VBA, we implemented a series of solutions that helped drive down the backlog by 90%. This experience led me to appreciate the scope and scale of the challenges VA faces in the delivery of benefits and the dedication it takes for employees to accomplish this noble mission.

During my current tenure at VA, I first served as a Senior Advisor for Policy and developed an enterprise governance model to drive integrated decision-making and execution across VA. In this role, I helped to expedite the development, review, and approval of two regulations adding asthma, rhinitis, and sinusitis, and nine rare respiratory cancers to the list of presumed service-connected disabilities due to military environmental exposures.

For the past six months, I have served as Senior Advisor for Policy Performing the Delegable Duties of the Under Secretary for Benefits, where I have worked to continue providing quality and timely benefits and services to the Veterans, family members and survivors VBA is privileged to serve. In this role, I lead VBA in delivering more benefits to more Veterans and survivors more quickly and accurately than ever before. I am proud to say, due to the efforts of dedicated VBA employees, VBA processed a record number of claims in Fiscal Year 2022, and we've already processed more claims so far in Fiscal Year 2023 than we had at the same point last year. If confirmed, I look forward to continuing this work, especially as we receive and process claims from generations of Veterans seeking benefits relating to toxic exposures under the bipartisan PACT Act, which Congress passed last year.

If confirmed as Under Secretary for Benefits, I will fight every day to ensure Veterans and their families receive timely claims decisions and access to crucial VBA programs. I will also focus on increasing transparency, improving collaboration, and keeping Veterans at the center of everything we do.

As former VA Administrator Omar Bradley once stated, "We are dealing with veterans, not procedures; with their problems, not ours." This vision of the role of VA and our country's obligation to those who have who have served is one that I know we all

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share. And if confirmed, I will do whatever I can to be a fierce, staunch advocate for veterans, their families, and survivors.

Thank you again for consideration of my nomination. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.