

Chairman Daniel K. Akaka

Good morning and welcome to today's hearing to consider four nominations for positions within the Department of Veterans Affairs: Roger Baker to be Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology; Will Gunn to be VA's General Counsel; Jose D. Riojas to be Assistant Secretary for Operations, Security and Preparedness; and John U. Sepulveda to be Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Management.

I am delighted to welcome all four nominees and their families and friends here today. Each nominee, if confirmed, will play an integral role in the overall management and day-to-day operations of VA.

Mr. Baker, if confirmed, you will be VA's Chief Information Officer. VA has suffered with continued failures in the ability to deliver functional computer programs. Your challenge will be to reverse course. You will also need to work with the Department of Defense to create a unified lifetime electronic health record for members of our armed services. And you will be responsible for resolving any IT issues as VA works to implement the Post 9/11 GI Bill.

Mr. Gunn, if confirmed, you will be responsible for proactive legal advice and representation of the Department. Given your experience in the Judge Advocate Generals Corps, I am confident that you possess the leadership ability to manage the decentralized VA legal system. You will be looked upon to provide a comprehensive evaluation of legislation, both introduced in Congress and proposed by VA, for its legal basis and impact.

Mr. Riojas, if confirmed, you will be responsible for coordinating VA's emergency management, preparedness, security, and law enforcement activities. These activities affect veterans on a daily basis, providing for the security of VA facilities, employees, veterans receiving care, and visitors, alike. The important task of preparing and coordinating VA's response to war, terrorism, national security matters, and natural disasters while ensuring continued service to veterans, will also be yours. VA has a fine record of emergency preparedness. I trust this will remain the case under your watch.

Mr. Sepulveda, if confirmed, you will have the task of managing VA's human resources activities during a period when there are many VA employees who are retirement-eligible. Your experience at the Office of Personnel Management, coupled with your general management experience, suggests that you have the qualifications for taking on the massive challenges of this office. When carrying out your responsibility with regard to VA's labor-management relations, I ask that you appreciate the unique relationship that VA employees have with the veterans they serve. This relationship goes beyond the bottom line and is based upon maintaining a workforce, many of whom are veterans themselves, that has a sense of service and dedication.

I thank you all for being here today, and look forward to your testimony.

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