

Thomas E. Harvey, Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Congressional And Legislative Affairs,  
Department of Veterans Affairs

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

Confirmation Hearing

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And Legislative Affairs  
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning as the President's nominee for the position of Assistant Secretary Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am honored to be nominated to that position by the President, and I appreciate the confidence shown in me by Secretary Jim Nicholson as he has supported that nomination.

I was pleased when Secretary Nicholson asked me to return to the Department of Veterans Affairs to help him out when he was newly appointed Secretary. Having served for five years as Chief Counsel and Staff Director of this Committee under the Chairmanship of Senator Al Simpson, I felt that I was aware of many of the valid concerns Members of Congress had with regard to the VA. I felt that with that background, I could help VA better respond to those concerns.

Having served for three years as the Deputy Administrator of the Veterans Administration, I felt that I knew how those issues and concerns affected that agency and hoped that I would be able to help the VA understand and respond to Congressional needs.

As a Vietnam combat veteran, serving two and a half years there as an Army infantry officer, I also felt that I understood something about this country's veterans. I volunteered for duty in Vietnam. Many of my fellow Vietnam veterans did not have that choice. They were young and out of school. They were drafted, and they served selflessly and courageously in that conflict because that is what their country asked of them. Tom Brokaw spoke of those who served in World War II as the "Greatest Generation" in his book of that name written some 50 years after the end of that conflict. I have every expectation that the Vietnam War will provide just such fodder to our own children when they write about us some years hence.

Mr. Chairman, should I have the honor of being confirmed for this position, I hope that I can effectively serve this Administration, the dedicated professionals I have been blessed to work with at the VA over the years, and, most significantly, this country's veterans.

I am accompanied by my wife, Cathie Black, and by my son Duffy Harvey today. Our daughter, Alison, is away at camp. I am also joined by a number of friends. And there are others who are here, or no doubt listening to this hearing streaming over their computers, who are my very fine colleagues at the Department of Veterans Affairs. There is no finer group of civil servants than those at the VA. In a way, they are fortunate. They have a readily comprehensible mission ? to administer a defined group of benefits ? health care, various monetary benefits, and a dignified burial ? to a certain group of people who did something special for this country. They donned the uniform and risked their lives to protect the freedoms we, as a nation, enjoy. I have never worked with a group that so clearly understands their mission and so fully embraces it.

I recently heard Warren Buffett say that, at the age of 75, he still ?tap dances to work every day.? Working with you, Mr. Chairman, and members of your Committee ? supporting a mission that is so noble ? joined by professionals like that ? I can tell you that, should I be confirmed for this position, I will be tap dancing to work every day.