

Joan M. Evans, Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs,  
Department of Veterans Affairs

Opening Statement of Joan M. Evans

Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the  
Department of Veterans Affairs

Before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

United States Senate

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Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for your consideration of my nomination to serve as the Department of Veterans Affairs' Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs. I am deeply humbled by President Barack Obama's nomination and the confidence both he and Secretary Shinseki have shown in me.

If confirmed, it will also be my honor to serve this Committee and the Congress as their chief resource in accessing information from the second largest agency in the federal government, the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I have worked on Capitol Hill for nearly two decades, heading up the Washington office for Congressman Terry Bruce of Illinois, as chief of staff to Congressman John Cox of Illinois then Congresswoman Darlene Hooley, the first Oregon Democrat to serve on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

While working for Congresswoman Hooley, I met and married my husband, Paul Evans, who is here with my daughter Kate. Paul has served three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan with the Oregon Air National Guard and was mobilized for 24 months in Operation Noble Eagle. He chairs the Oregon Governor's Veterans Services Task Force and is the Governor's chief policy advisor on Veterans, Military and Emergency Management. He remains Director of Operations for the 116th Air Control Squadron at Camp Rilea in Warrenton, Oregon.

My marriage to Paul has given me a keen appreciation for the sacrifices of America's Veterans. I am also aware of the challenges families face as a part-time caregiver for my father, an atomic Veteran with a service-connected cancer, and subsequently my mother, who predeceased him putting his health care needs above her own.

I am firmly committed to President Obama's and Secretary Shinseki's vision for transforming VA into a 21st Century organization that is Veteran-centric, results-driven, and forward-looking.

If confirmed as Secretary Shinseki's principal Congressional advisor, I will work to make the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs a highly effective partner to Congress in meeting the needs of the nation's Veterans.

I understand your need for quick and complete information about issues and events affecting constituents. I understand the uncertainty of waiting late in the evening to receive needed information for the next day's hearing or mark-up. I also understand the frustrations of Veterans

and their families seeking services and benefits from offices that are overly bureaucratic and seem to take forever to process simple requests.

By improving outreach to members of Congress, their staff and Committees, the Assistant Secretary and OCLA can help VA leaders better understand and engage with Congress on policy matters. Our work should be based on a commitment to prompt and appropriate responses to Congressional requests for information and assistance. We should also shine a light on potential or upcoming issues. If confirmed, my mission will be to ensure Secretary Shinseki and VA leadership as well as members of the Senate and House of Representatives and the authorizing and appropriating Committees have all that they need to perform their respective roles efficiently and effectively.

I appreciate the work of the Chairman, Ranking Member, and Committee members, and I greatly value your leadership in honoring the service and sacrifice of our Nation's Veterans. I look forward to working with you, if confirmed, to make VA's Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs a more effective partner in meeting the needs of this Committee and the Congress, and of the Veterans we serve.

Thank you.