

Statement of Paul R. Lawrence

Nominee for Under Secretary, Benefits, Department of Veterans Affairs

Before the Committee on Veterans Affairs

United States Senate

Chairman Isakson, Ranking member Tester, 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 Under Secretary of Benefits, Department of Veterans Affairs. I have had the privilege to meet individually with many of you after I was nominated, and can say that I have benefited immensely from your advice and insights about ensuring our Nation's Veterans and their families receive the benefits they have earned. I am deeply honored to have been nominated by President Trump.

To start, let me tell you a little about myself and my background. I was raised in an Army family, my father served 24 years and was in the Korean and Viet Nam wars. He taught me many valuable leadership lessons, but the one that has consistently guided me was "Mission First and Men Always". He is buried in Section 66 of Arlington National Cemetery. My 93-year-old mother is at home today and I am sure watching these proceedings. She came from a large family – 11 brothers and sisters. Five of her brothers answered the call and served in the Armed Forces during WWII. My middle name, Reynold, was given to me in honor of her only brother who didn't return, killed at Normandy.

I have 1 brother and 2 sisters. My brother and I both were commissioned into the Army through ROTC. I delayed my entry to active duty after graduating from the University of Massachusetts to earn a Ph.D. in Economics from Virginia Tech. There I learned how to apply scientific methods and conduct rigorous data-based evaluation and decision-making. I also had the opportunity to study under a Professor who would later win the Nobel Prize in Economics.

After graduate school, I served on active duty in the Army in the Finance Corp. I left as an Airborne qualified Captain and received the Meritorious Service Medal. I moved to the DC-area and got married. Ann, my wife of 33 years is here with me today. Her love and support have been invaluable to me. We have 2 children. Our son is an optometrist completing his residency in low-vision at the VA Medical Center in Hampton, Virginia.

For most of my professional career, I have worked as a consultant in large professional services firms helping Federal government leaders improve efficiency and effectiveness. I have worked at many of the cabinet agencies, including the VA. The majority of my career was as a Partner in Accounting firms, where I focused on financial management and improving organization performance. Importantly, through my work I have experience with many of the activities conducted by VBA. I have led projects dealing directly the processing of large volumes of materials, originating and servicing single family mortgages, and monitoring student loans. I have first-hand experience with opportunities and management challenges similar to those facing VBA.

I have also worked in two global information technology companies. This work gave me experience integrating technology into processes to drive efficiencies. Their large size helped me develop

management skills appropriate for the scale of the Federal government. Finally, in my present company I have spent the last year working on an Agency's response to the Executive Order on Comprehensive Agency Reform. This has further enhanced my perspective on driving change and collaborating with the Office of Management and Budget.

What is differentiating about my experiences as a consultant to the Federal government is I have conducted extensive research and thought leadership into how government is managed by senior leaders. Insights and tips from interviewing a wide cross section of government leaders has enabled me to learn what contributed to their success. If confirmed, I plan to apply many of these best practices.

I am passionate about Veterans' issues and want to contribute to the efforts to improve the support provided to Veterans by the VA. I know this is special time to be part of the team at the VA and be able to contribute. Efforts to support our Veterans are a key part of the national agenda and the Congress and Senate have generously provided the resources. And, through the series of laws that have been passed in the last year, addressing Accountability, Appeals Modernization, the Forever G.I Bill, and the agency reform initiative, many of the tools are now in place. It is a unique time to support Veterans and I would like to do my part.

To that end, there are three priorities I will focus on if confirmed.

The first is providing Veterans with the benefits they have earned in a manner that honors their service. The programs of the VBA – Compensation, Home Loan Guaranty, Education, Life Insurance, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment, Pension and Fiduciary, and Benefits Assistance – serve millions and rightly require more than \$100 billion in support. Providing this support should be done efficiently, timely and with high quality. In the recent past there have been many improvements and much has been accomplished. I would plan to build on these and accelerate the improvements. We would continue to adopt a culture of continuous improvement, streamlining processes and reallocating resources to increase effectiveness.

The second is ensure we are strong fiscal stewards of the money entrusted to us. At the same time, we seek to aggressively support our Veterans we must be equally vigilant supporting tax payers who provide our resources. I will work with the Department, OMB and others to apply the most appropriate best practices for financial rigor. One of my initial efforts will be to examine Improper Payments.

The third is to foster a culture of collaboration. Experience has taught me that leaders who model and foster a collaborative culture reap benefits in terms of employee satisfaction and productivity. More importantly, there are many groups and organizations working to support our Veterans. I will work closely with the Senate, the House, across the Department, the DoD, our VSO Partners, the Unions, and others with similar objectives. I will encourage focus and alignment on our common interests.

I, again, want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to answering your questions.