

Mr. Charles L. Hopkins III Nominee for Assistant Secretary Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness (OSP) Department of Veterans Affairs

Prepared statement of Mr. Charles L. Hopkins III
Nominee for Assistant Secretary
Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness (OSP)
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, good morning. Thank you for the privilege and honor to appear before you today. I am deeply honored and humbled by the confidence President Bush has shown in nominating me to serve as the Assistant Secretary for Operations, Security, and Preparedness in the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am also most grateful to Secretary Jim Nicholson for his confidence in my abilities to once again serve this great nation.

For the past 37 years it has been my privilege to serve this great country in many capacities and my dedication to the United States Military is marked by a history of service and commitment. I spent 29 of those years in the United States Navy. During my tours at sea on submarines and ashore in many different homeports, I developed a deep respect and appreciation for the personnel who serve in our Armed Forces and their families. Time and again they displayed the Honor, Courage and Commitment that makes our Armed Forces the greatest in the world. As time marches on, they too will become Veterans.

Personal sacrifice and devotion to duty is routine among members of the military so they deserve our unwavering support both while wearing the uniform and when they transition into the community of veterans. I am privileged to have this opportunity to work for them and support that critically important mission stated many years ago by President Lincoln: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan." I have come full circle - I proudly wore the Navy uniform for many years and now I have an opportunity to serve our nation's veterans through continued public service.

So I am inspired by them to tackle the challenges of the mission of the Department of Veterans' Affairs and more specifically, the challenges that this new position offers. If confirmed, I look forward to joining the team of professionals at the Department of Veterans Affairs to accomplish that mission.

The Assistant Secretary for Operations, Security, and Preparedness is responsible for providing advice and counsel to the Secretary and other senior leaders on the department's capabilities and readiness to continue services to veterans and their families and respond to contingency support missions during national emergencies. I see this position as the custodian of special trust that the Department has to ensure our nation's veterans, their families, visitors and the staffs that serve them, have secure and safe environments for care and service. If confirmed, I will serve the veterans of this great country with the same dedication and passion as when I served on active duty and I will commit all my efforts to ensure that all veterans are treated with the dignity and respect they rightfully deserve.

For the last 20 months, I have been the Director, Office of National Security Coordination (now known as National Continuity Programs) at the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This office is the Lead Agent for Executive Branch Continuity Programs. My responsibilities focused on formulating guidance, and establishing common standards for executive branch departments and agencies to use in developing viable and executable continuity plans; facilitate interagency coordination; and oversee and assess the status of continuity capabilities of Federal Executive Branch departments and agencies. So I am very familiar with all the work that must be accomplished to form a new, significantly expanded, organization and to also remedy any the deficiencies that exist within the area of operations, security, and preparedness. I am confident that my experience in the United States Navy and my public work since then has helped hone the skills required to lead the organization effectively and contribute to the successful accomplishment of a wide variety of important tasks.

If confirmed, I would like to share with you the priorities that I would pursue as the Assistant Secretary for Operations, Security, and Preparedness. First, I will improve the ability of our law enforcement officers to accommodate the needs of all veterans and more importantly, the special needs of veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. Next, I will work closely with the Department's Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefit Administration and National Cemetery Administration to protect veterans, their families, the people, facilities and infrastructure needed to deliver the highest quality care and services and ensure continuing availability of that service. I will work diligently to ensure the security of people and information within the Department and develop the plans, policies and procedures to provide for appropriate response and to rapidly reconstitute departmental operations after a national disaster or incident. Next, while implementing the new Executive Order for National Continuity Programs (NSPD-5 1/HSPD-20) with our Federal partners and stakeholders, I will strengthen the internal and external command, control and communications links and develop training programs that will continually improve the department's operational and emergency management capabilities. Finally, I will establish a robust program evaluation mechanism to regularly assess my divisions and the department's performance in each of our primary mission areas.

Mr. Chairman, I testify before you today as a proud son of a veteran of World War II and a member the Greatest Generation, a generation of great men and women who understood the meaning of service to their country. It was their service and commitment that saved this nation and the world from tyranny and oppression and it was my parents that instilled in me the meaning of honor, commitment, courage and service to our country. If confirmed I intend to follow the great examples of my parent's generation and serve our nations' heroes with great respect, humility and passion.

I am a humble man and I only hope that I have instilled the same sense of purpose in my family that my parents instilled in me. Only time will tell but today I am proud to introduce my family members that have joined me for this hearing. First, and foremost, is my wife of 37 years Martha. Next, my son-in-law Major Jano Carlson USMC (a veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom), his wife and my daughter Shelagh. Next, another son-in-law Special Agent Bradley Duckworth, with the Navy Criminal Investigative Service, cannot be

here today as he is currently serving in Iraq; his wife Shannon and my entire family prays for his speedy return. Next, is a wonderful man and great father, my son Charles and his wife Traci.

In closing I would like to say to my entire family that I am now and will be forever grateful for your constant and unwavering love and support. I thank you all for the great support that you have always provided in our journey of service to our great nation.

Sir, it's truly an honor for me to be here today. I stand ready to serve and look forward to your questions.