

John U. Sepúlveda, Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration at the Department of Veterans Affairs

Opening Statement of John U. Sepúlveda  
Nominee for Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and  
Administration at the Department of Veterans Affairs  
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Chairman Akaka, Senator Burr and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am deeply honored to be nominated by President Obama to serve as Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration at the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am also honored to have Secretary Shinseki's trust and confidence to serve in this important position. I would like to also express my profound gratitude to my wife Awilda Rodriguez-Sepulveda, who has encouraged and supported my love and passion for public service these many years.

To better serve those who have served this country with courage, dedication and sacrifice, our Veterans and their families, President Obama and Secretary Shinseki have called for the transformation of the Department of Veterans Affairs into a 21st century organization. Such an organization would be completely and exquisitely focused on meeting the needs of our Veterans; deploying state of the art technology, efficient delivery systems and dedicated and well-trained employees to provide to our former warriors comprehensive, effective and expedited benefits, mental health programs and medical services whenever and wherever they are needed.

Key to achieving the transformation of Veterans Affairs is the effective and strategic management and development of the Department's human capital: the 280,000 employees at VA who work hard each day to serve our Veterans and their families. In other words, we must make sure that we have the right people doing the right job at the right place at the right time, at all times. If confirmed as Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, I will be responsible for providing leadership, direction and management of the Department's human capital assets and human resource policies, working closely with the Deputy Secretary and executive team.

As Deputy Secretary Gould has already testified, VA must invest in our civil servants to better serve our veterans now and to support the transformation of the Department. This investment must include expanding training opportunities for employees, including managers, using a broad spectrum of delivery systems and media. Greater use of automation and technology to efficiently, expeditiously and securely process and manage all personnel actions, including hiring, performance evaluations, employee benefits and records. Promoting new and existing work-life initiatives within VA to help maintain productivity and morale. Preparing for the large numbers of VA employee retirements that will be coming with effective succession planning and proactive

recruitment strategies must also be part of this overall investment agenda. These are among the specific areas of human capital development that I look forward to addressing if confirmed.

Moreover, VA must continue to strive to be a model employer of choice for veterans, people with disabilities, women and minorities. Indeed, strengthening efforts to increase the numbers of veterans employed at VA is and will continue to be a priority.

I have been a public servant for much of my adult life, having served at the local, state and federal levels. So I know first hand how our public servants strive each day to carry out their jobs with dedication, professionalism and integrity. If given the opportunity to serve as Assistant Secretary, an ongoing priority for me will be to make sure that all VA employees are treated with the respect that they deserve.

Working with the Deputy Secretary, my colleagues on the executive team, and VA HR teams throughout the country, I will help lead efforts to make available appropriate and updated customer service training to all employees, especially those providing direct services to Veterans and their families. We must make sure that all Veterans seeking information or services from the VA are treated, at all times, with the respect and consideration that they have earned and deserve.

I am under no illusion that changing an organization as large and complex as Veterans Affairs will be easy, simple and quick, especially given that the Department must, in the short-term, also accomplish several major new programs and initiatives, including implementing the New GI Bill this summer; successfully integrating hundreds of thousands of Priority Group 8 and OEF and OIF Veterans into the disability claims and health care systems; and significantly improving the quality and timeliness of claims processing; among other immediate challenges. However, I believe if given the opportunity I would bring the necessary experience and leadership skills in human resources and change management to contribute significantly to accomplishing the goal of a 21st century VA set by President Obama and Secretary Shinseki.

While serving as the Deputy Director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the federal government's primary human resources agency, I had the opportunity to lead or work on several internal and government-wide civil service reform initiatives.

My nearly five-years of service on an advisory panel to the Intelligence Community focused on diversity and human capital issues helped to familiarize me with many of the current human resources challenges facing virtually all federal agencies, including Veterans Affairs.

My experience in federal program transformation includes my participation and leadership in the successful modernization in the early 1990s of two major programs at the Federal Housing Administration, including the restructuring of 81 field offices and the creation of two processing centers achieved with the support of HUD's labor unions.

Deputy Secretary Gould noted in his earlier testimony before this Committee that among his first steps would be "synchronizing the people, process and technology" in order to achieve the people centric, results oriented and forward looking VA that Secretary Shinseki is committed to delivering to the American people. If given the opportunity, I look forward to being part of the Secretary's executive team that will no doubt achieve this synchrony on behalf our Veterans.

I would like to close by again thanking this distinguished Committee for giving me the opportunity to testify. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee to ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs successfully meets our Nation's obligation to our Veterans no matter where they may live.