

FORMER SENATOR BOB DOLE

SENATOR BOB DOLE REMARKS  
CONFIRMATION HEARING OF  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SECRETARY NOMINEE  
GENERAL ERIC SHINSEKI  
SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
January 14,2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.  
I'm pleased to be here with my former colleague and dear friend, Senator Dan Inouye, to introduce an American hero.

General Shinseki has an outstanding, impeccable record of service and personal sacrifice for our country. I personally thank him for all he has done from Vietnam, to Bosnia, to Afghanistan and Iraq, to the present day for his willingness again to offer his dedication, knowledge and experience to this country. I know he his assignment will take time away from his cherished grandchildren, which is not easy, particularly when General Shinseki has already given as much as he has.

As I said when Senator Inouye and I had the pleasure of introducing the current Secretary, General James Peake: it is good to have a Secretary who has been a patient and who knows what it is like to have been in the system .  
General Shinseki has lived with a disability since his service in Vietnam. A day does not go by that he is not inconvenienced in some way or his life affected because he sacrificed for his belief in his country.

General Shinseki is a West Point graduate as was General Peake. He was Army Chief of Staff when the President appointed Secretary Peake Army Surgeon General. Both men were wounded twice in Vietnam. They are long time friends. With General Shinseki following General Peake the President Elect is doing the right thing by ensuring continuity for our veterans -- who deserve the best and they will get it with this appointment.

General Shinseki will be a strong voice for vets in the new administration and an individual who truly knows what our commitment to deserving veterans should be. About two years ago I was on a flight with a colonel who was headed to Afghanistan for a second time. He handed me a card and on the back was a quote by John Stewart Mill: "War is an ugly thing," it read, "but it is not the ugliest of things. The decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself." This is something General Shinseki understands.

As a free country, America honors its commitments, and the first of those commitments is support to men and women in uniform and their families who risk everything in most

cases. We will keep our commitment because we have men like General Shinseki who will serve and do everything that should be done for our deserving veterans and promised them by a grateful nation.

As the members of this committee know, in 2007, I joined former HHS Secretary Donna Shalala on a Presidential Commission examining the care that we provide to our warriors returning home from our recent and ongoing wars.

We found excellent care within the DoD and VA systems, but we also found many challenges that needed to be addressed so that patients and families were not burdened more than they already are when a loved one in the service faces serious injury or a lifelong disability.

I was pleased that President Bush and many members of Congress in both parties took many, if not all, of our recommendations to heart. They were recommendations that we constructed through what we believe was rigorous examination and broad input from many people that know the system inside and out, what its strengths and what its weaknesses are.

When I called General Shinseki and offered to help, I learned he does not consider being Secretary of VA as political appointment and I compliment President Elect Obama for keeping the VA that way. The VA certainly should be free of politics.

The President Elect has made a wise choice and his appointment is yet another powerful indicator of how we care for, and respect, our men and women who serve our country. I cannot think of a better person to look after our 25 million plus veterans than this true American hero who has done about everything one can think of in serving his country. I wish I were still in the Senate so I could vote for his confirmation.

God Bless America, General Shinseki, and our men and women whose service has kept us free.