

Ranking Member Larry E. Craig

STATEMENT OF SENATOR LARRY E. CRAIG

HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF
MICHAEL J. KUSSMAN, M.D.

May 16, 2007

Good morning Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you very much for calling this hearing to review the qualifications of Dr. Michael Kussman to head the VA health care system. I also want to thank all of the witnesses on the first panel for coming here this morning to voice their views on this man.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say at the outset of this hearing that based on a review of his record and having spent some time with him personally, I believe Dr. Kussman is very qualified for this job. And I strongly support his nomination.

Mike Kussman, a physician for almost 40 years, is a veteran of the United States Army, who retired as a Brigadier General after serving this nation on active duty for over 20 years.. . He has published numerous papers; served on countless boards and Committees inside and outside of government; and managed some of the military's largest medical installations.

In short, he is a highly educated and dedicated, Army veteran, with management experience who understands both the military and VA health care systems inside and out.

But Mr. Chairman, I'd also like to suggest to the Committee that perhaps Dr. Kussman is more than simply qualified for the job. After all qualifications are largely just objective facts about a person. They are a person's education and experience. While I hope I'm not offending him by saying this. Candidly, I'm sure there are a few other people along with Dr. Kussman who are technically qualified to lead VA's health care system.

But, when you add Mike's qualifications together with the enormous passion for the job he displayed during my interview with him. And then you wrap that passion around the integrity and character of this gentleman, I find someone with more than just qualifications. I find the right man for the job.

Mr. Chairman, I know you and I share this view of Dr. Kussman. So, I hope we are able to work with our colleagues to move quickly on his confirmation. The VA health care system needs strong, confirmed leadership at the helm to care for our veterans. We have spent nearly 9 months seeking out the person to fill the position left vacant by Dr. Perlin's departure last year.

I believe we have found that person. He enjoys the strong support of our veterans' service organizations, the professional medical community, many of his former colleagues in the military, and even his current employees. I think that speaks volumes about this nominee. I hope our colleagues will join us in supporting Dr. Kussman.

Thank you, again Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses.