

Mr. GEORGE OPFER NOMINEE FOR INSPECTOR GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS

STATEMENT BY GEORGE OPFER  
BEFORE THE  
SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS' COMMITTEE

CONFIRMATION HEARING FOR  
INSPECTOR GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to be here today, having been nominated by President Bush to lead the Office of Inspector General (OIG), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA's mission to serve, honor, and recognize veterans for their service to our nation is the noblest of callings. As in wars past, Afghanistan and Iraq continue to remind us of the incredible sacrifices our men and women in uniform make to defend our freedom and protect us from terrorism. The Department's sacred mission, "to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan," is the legacy of President Abraham Lincoln. This legacy extends to an estimated 25 million living veterans and their families.

VA is the second largest agency in the Federal government, with about 230,000 employees and an annual budget of approximately \$70 billion. In serving America's veterans, VA provides health care, income and readjustment benefits, and memorial and burial services. VA maintains facilities in every state, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Providing these services presents VA with constant challenges.

The OIG has the formidable task of staying abreast of these challenges, and focusing its resources in areas that will maximize the impact it has on helping the VA accomplish its mission. Key issue areas currently being addressed by the OIG include:

- ? Access to high-quality and safe health care.
- ? Accurate and timely benefits processing.
- ? Reliable financial management systems.
- ? Efficient and economical procurement practices.
- ? Effective and secure information management technologies.

In addressing these issues, the OIG is resolved to ensure that VA programs and operations are efficiently and effectively managed, and free of violations of law, waste, and abuse. The OIG is also committed to aggressively investigating, arresting, and prosecuting persons perpetrating crimes affecting VA.

While every position involves a learning curve, by reason of my experience and my commitment to service to our Country, I believe that I am qualified to fill this position. My 35-year Federal

career has been dedicated to law enforcement and oversight of Federal programs. My work in the inspector general community, at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Labor (DOL), and with the Secret Service has provided me with the necessary experience and knowledge to fulfill the responsibilities of this position in accordance with the mandate of the IG Act. I am intimately familiar with the role, function, operations, and challenges of leading an Office of Inspector General.

I have worked on numerous issues that are systemic to government-wide operations. Financial management, information management, procurement, performance, and accountability are not unique to any one agency. As the Inspector General for FEMA and as the Deputy Inspector General for DOL, I have managed and directed a wide variety audits and investigations of agency programs and individuals. I have in-depth knowledge of government auditing standards, which focus on opportunities to improve the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of programs. I also have extensive experience in the conduct and management of criminal, civil, and administrative investigations, including a long association in working successfully with Assistant U.S. Attorneys to prosecute cases on behalf of the Federal government.

The IG Act is as relevant today as it was over 25 years ago when it was first enacted. It provides the Inspector General with the authority and responsibility to independently conduct oversight into all programs and activities within the Department. It also requires the Inspector General to keep the Congress and the Secretary fully informed about problems and deficiencies and the need for corrective action. As Inspector General, I will use this authority to ensure an independent and objective review of the facts, whether the work involves allegations of impropriety, inspections for compliance with regulations and policy, or audits of financial systems. I will not hesitate to review and report on any issue of fraud, waste, abuse, or mismanagement brought to my attention. I will also aggressively pursue criminal activity and work to get founded cases prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

VA OIG has an outstanding reputation in the inspector general community and within the Department. This reputation has been earned through the hard work and dedication of its staff. I look forward to becoming part of the VA OIG team and carrying on the legacy of working with Congress and the Department to help ensure our Nation's veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service to their country. My goal is to be an agent for positive change and help VA become the best-managed service delivery organization in Government.

As Inspector General, I will continue to recruit, develop, and retain a diverse and motivated workforce. OIG training programs and facilities must provide staff with the necessary skills and tools to excel at their jobs. Overseeing an agency as multifaceted and complex as VA requires OIG personnel to be able to respond to ever-changing challenges. I will remain devoted to ensuring that the OIG team remains ready to fulfill their mission in an independent, objective, thorough, and timely manner.

In conclusion, I am honored to be considered for this position. If confirmed, I will assume the duties of Inspector General with enthusiasm and a commitment to uphold the public trust. Mr. Chairman, I pledge to work collaboratively with you and all the members of the Committee to

address the many critical issues impacting the efficient, effective, and economical delivery of benefits to our Nation's veterans.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement. I would welcome any questions that you or other members might have.