

Chairman Patty Murray

Opening Statement of Chairman Murray  
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Hearing: Nomination of William S. Greenberg to be Judge, United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and Keith Kelly to be Assistant Secretary to the Veterans' Employment and Training Service at the Department of Labor  
December 12, 2012

“Good morning and welcome to today’s hearing to consider the nominations of Williams S. Greenberg to be a judge of the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and Keith Kelly to be Assistant Secretary of Veterans’ Employment and Training Service at the Department of Labor.

I am pleased to welcome the nominees and their families, and I congratulate each of you on your nomination.

The nominees sitting before us have strong credentials and a history of service. Because we’ll learn more about their qualifications during introductions, I won’t spend time repeating what we’ll hear shortly. I would, however, like to briefly discuss the positions for which these two gentlemen have been nominated and the challenges they will face.

Veterans and members of this Committee know all too well the problems confronting the disability claims system. We know that it still takes VA too long to issue decisions. We know that VA’s error rate remains too high. And we know that the number and complexity of claims being filed continues to grow. We also know the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims occupies a unique position as the only national court that reviews veterans’ benefits decisions. As a result, the problems that have for too long plagued the disability claims system become the problems of the Court.

Mr. Greenberg, if confirmed, you’ll be confronted with these problems. There is no shortage of potential cases that may reach the Court in the very near future. You will be asked to carry a substantial workload. You also must know that for many veterans, the Court is seen as their last hope after fighting for months, years and in some cases decades to obtain the benefits they have earned. They look to the Court for a fair and equitable resolution of their claim.

This is why any nomination to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims is of such great importance and why any vacancy must be filled by a qualified, competent, and motivated individual.

Now, let me turn to the importance of the role of Assistant Secretary for the Veterans’ Employment and Training Service.

With the high rate of unemployment among young veterans, and the continued draw down of troops in Afghanistan, ensuring servicemembers have the tools and resources needed to succeed in the civilian workforce has never been more important. The Department of Labor plays a critical role in this process. It provides servicemembers with employment and training information through TAP, monitors and develops local employment and training opportunities

for veterans in its Jobs for Veterans state grant program, and investigates allegations of wrongdoing under USERRA.

Mr. Kelly, if confirmed, you will be responsible for overseeing these programs and addressing the current employment and training needs of our veterans. Our veterans have the leadership ability, discipline, and technical skills, to not only find work, but to excel in the civilian workforce.

But despite all that, we still have a double digit unemployment rate for veterans.

These veterans can't find a job to support their families, don't have an income that provides stability, and don't have work that provides them with the self-esteem and pride that is so critical to their transition home. To help address this issue, I introduced and the President signed into law, the bipartisan, bicameral, and comprehensive, VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011.

Among other things, this law calls on DoL to partner with federal, state, and industry officials to eliminate the barriers preventing veterans from using their military training to acquire the licenses and credentials needed for civilian employment. I have heard from countless veterans in Washington State and throughout the country who have been turned away by employers for not having the proper civilian licenses and certifications.

This shouldn't be the case.

The Department of Transportation is setting an example by working with stakeholders to overcome the barriers that prevent veterans from successfully transitioning from military service to careers in the transportation industry.

Mr. Kelly, if confirmed, I would like to see VETS take on a more active role in addressing licensure and certification issues.

I also want take a minute to talk about public/private partnerships. I have been urging companies – large and small – to provide employment opportunities for America's veterans. I have asked them:

to educate their human resources teams about the benefits of hiring veterans and how skills learned in the military translate to the work a company does; to provide job training and resources for transitioning servicemembers; to publicize job openings with Veterans Service Organizations, at local military bases to help connect veterans with jobs, and to work with local One-Stop Career Centers; to develop an internal veterans group to mentor recently discharged veterans; and to reach out to local schools to help develop a pipeline of the many veterans that are using the GI bill.

I am concerned that VETS has not taken an active enough role in developing these critical private/public partnerships. If confirmed, I would like to see you change this.

I look forward to hearing your testimony and look forward to learning more about your qualifications for the positions for which you have been nominated.

With that, I will turn to Ranking Member Burr for his opening statement.”