

Prepared Statement of Paul R. Lawrence, Ph.D.,  
Nominee to be Deputy Secretary for the  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States Senate

February 19, 2025

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, distinguished members of the committee – thank you for the opportunity to be here today and for considering my nomination.

I would also like to thank President Trump for the honor of this nomination and his trust in me. Today, I hope to earn your trust as well.

I am fortunate to be joined by my lovely wife of 39 years, Anne, my son, Dr. Gregory Lawrence, an optometrist who did his residency at the Hampton VA Medical Center and my brother Chris Lawrence, also an Army Veteran and Airborne Ranger. I also want to thank my 100-year-old mother who is watching at home right now. I wouldn't be here without all of their love and support.

The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs has a long history of bipartisan accomplishments on behalf of America's Veterans. Your commitment to taking care of the men and women who have worn the uniform is above reproach, and I want you to know I share that commitment.

The sacrifices of military Veterans and their loved ones are my own. I've lived them.

I grew up in an Army family. My father served 24 years, with deployments in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He taught me many valuable lessons about leadership and what it means to serve.

My middle name, Reynold, was given to me in honor of my uncle, who was killed fighting in Normandy.

My family's love of country and tradition of service compelled my brother and I to join the Army, where we were both commissioned through ROTC. During my tenure in the military, I graduated from the Army's Airborne School, earned the Meritorious Service Medal and rose to the rank of captain.

My Army service taught me the value of leading with integrity, honor and respect. But most importantly, it instilled in me a dedication to serving my fellow Veterans that has shaped my life's work.

I spent many years working as a consultant, helping bring efficiencies to large organizations. Then, I had the opportunity during the first Trump administration to serve as VA's Under Secretary for Benefits – one of the most rewarding experiences of my career.

In that role, I led more than 24,000 employees as they administered a range of benefits, including disability compensation, pensions, education, home loans, Veterans' readiness and employment, and life insurance.

During my time at VA, our Veterans Benefits Administration team made great strides in increasing productivity, customer service and convenience for Veterans. Here are a few highlights of which I'm particularly proud:

- During my time at VBA, the disability claim backlog was reduced to its lowest in history.

- VBA guaranteed a record 1.2 million home loans for Veterans in FY 2020 – surpassing the previous record of 700,000.
- We successfully launched the GI Bill, the Appeals Modernization Act, and the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act.
- We successfully launched Solid Start and the Veterans Benefits Banking Program.
- VBA reduced improper payments by more than \$350 million.
- I conducted over 100 telephone town halls that reached nearly 5.7 million people and I took more than 1,500 unfiltered questions about how we were serving Veterans.
- And, thanks to aggressive hiring and training, we saw the highest number of Vocational Counselors in place at VBA.

If I have the privilege of returning to VA, I will work to build on the many bipartisan successes of this committee. To that end, I pledge to work with you to:

- Get VA's electronic health record modernization effort back on track.
- Ensure VA provides Veterans with the health care choices and options Congress promised them as part of the MISSION Act.
- Properly and faithfully implement the PACT Act, and

- Put veterans at the center of everything the department does and make accountability, customer service and caring the cornerstones of service among the department's work force.

If confirmed, I will be a tireless advocate for the men and women who have fought for our liberty. I will work to ensure every eligible Veteran and VA beneficiary gets the benefits and services they've earned at their convenience. And I will fulfill VA's mission, which President Lincoln first set out 160 years ago next month.

Thank you and I am happy to take your questions.