

Mrs. Lisette McSoud Mondello Nominee, Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Department of Veterans Affairs

Opening Statement

of

Lisette McSoud Mondello

Nominee, Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs Department of Veterans Affairs

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is a great honor to be nominated by President Bush to serve as Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am also most grateful to Secretary Jim Nicholson for his confidence in my abilities

It is a privilege to be introduced by my mentor, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison from my home state of Texas. Senator Hutchison is a tireless advocate and supporter of our nation's veterans. Thank you, Senator, for your friendship and support.

When I was growing up in Texas, my dad and uncle would show me pictures and tell me stories of their days in the service. My dad served in the Pacific during World War II. My uncle served in France during World War I. Later, I worked with Sam Johnson, a Korea and Vietnam veteran who spent nearly seven years in a North Vietnamese prison camp. I met many of his fellow POWs and remain awed by their courage and love of country.

There is a country and western song entitled: "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys." I would say rather "My Heroes Have Always Been Veterans." I have chosen my heroes well.

Without the millions of men and women whose love of country and dedication to duty, we wouldn't enjoy the freedom we have today. I consider it a privilege to be able to serve those who have served our nation and defended the cause of freedom and liberty here and throughout the world.

I have spent my professional life both in the public and private sectors, learning the art of effective communication and how it can serve mission priorities. I have seen how constituents and constituencies are better served when they have clear and accurate information available to them. I have worked in small offices and large bureaucracies and seen both operate most effectively.

I served nearly a decade in the Senate on the staffs of two highly effective Senators?Sen. Hutchison and Sen. Al D'Amato of New York. I have also served, most recently as a Senior Advisor in the Department of Education under two dedicated Secretaries (Rod Paige and

Margaret Spellings) during a time of sweeping reform of our public education system. If confirmed to this position, I am looking forward to working with the dedicated staff at the Department of Veterans Affairs to support their objectives, initiatives and programs as we ensure that veterans receive the information they need to access their benefits and VA's services. I am also committed to building strong alliances and partnerships with state and local governments as we work together to assist our veterans.

Mr. Chairman, we have a duty at the Department of Veterans Affairs—a duty to honor and serve our nation's veterans. Within the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, we are charged with communicating services and programs to veterans, their families, service organizations and state and local governments. It is imperative that we do our job well.

Information presented in an unclear and confusing manner is frustrating to our veterans, their families and those who serve them. If the website is difficult to navigate or if information is scattered and difficult to find, we must find ways to improve. For veterans like my father, who would not turn to the web for information, we must look at all avenues of communication to reach them. Our veterans deserve our very best efforts.

More than 200,000 professionals at the Department serve our veterans—every day they provide world class care, cutting edge research, and other benefits and services. It is our job in Public and Intergovernmental Affairs to reach out to our veterans, their families and those who work with them, to ensure that they have the information they need to make informed decisions about the benefits, services and programs that are available to them.

I will look for ways to constantly improve our communications efforts both externally and internally. If confirmed, I will reach out to State and local governments, to veterans and community organizations, as well as to Congress to explore ways to better communicate information about the VA's programs and services to our veterans and their families.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank my family and friends, many of whom are here today, for their support. My husband Joe Mondello, who is also a Senate staff alum and has provided me with unwavering support, and my son Matthew, who is very excited that Mommy is going to help our soldiers when they come home. And my parents, Rosemary and Pete Elizondo of Dallas, who have always supported me in all my endeavors.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for your consideration of my nomination. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.