

Ranking Member Richard Burr

Statement of Senator Richard Burr
December 9, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to both of our nominees and your family members in attendance this morning.

You both have been nominated to assume leadership positions at a critical time in our nation's history. We are a nation at war, nearly the longest the United States of America has ever been engaged in.

Our advanced medical technology has made it possible for our servicemen and women to survive traumatic injuries that they never would have survived during previous wars. But when they come home, they need a state-of-the-art health care system, as well as a hassle-free benefits system, that will help them return to civilian lives that are productive and full of promise. I have two prime examples from my home state: Eric Edmundson and Ted Wade.

Both of these young men came home from war broken in mind and body. But thanks to the constant love and dedication of their family members, as well as a medical system that focused on restoring their capabilities to the fullest extent possible, they are getting better every day.

Today's veterans expect this of us. They want a VA that is forward looking, innovative, and responsive.

That's why both of your nominations are so vital.

Dr. Petzel, you and I met last week in my office to discuss many of the challenges the Veterans Health Administration faces. I told you that I believed what VHA needs is a leader who will shake things up, one who is bold, and who is willing to challenge an entrenched bureaucracy often wedded to ideas of the past.

I must admit, when I first heard that the nominee for this critical position was a career VA employee, I wondered how an insider could be the change agent of an administration where he has worked for 37 years.

But after meeting you, I think your experience and record may uniquely position you as the right person for this job. I learned from our discussion that you and I both share the vision that VA must continue to evolve into a 21st Century organization.

In the course of this hearing, I look forward to continuing the conversation we began in my office about what you hope to accomplish should you be confirmed.

Dr. Perea-Henze, you too have been nominated to an important position. The office you will head, if confirmed, serves as VA's internal "think tank" that can be the impetus behind innovation

to improve VA's service to veterans. This office needs someone who will not only assist in developing effective policies and plans, but also someone who can be a forceful advocate within the Department to put those policies and plans into action.

In conclusion, congratulations to you both on your nominations. I again remind you of the importance of the mission you are seeking to undertake. There is perhaps no greater mission in government than the care of those who have worn the nation's uniform in service.

I look forward to hearing from each of you about how you plan to improve the VA services for veterans during your tenure in VA.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.