

Statement of Cheryl L. Mason
Nominee for Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals
Before the Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States Senate
October 4, 2017

Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Tester, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, I want to thank you for the opportunity and privilege to come before you and seek your endorsement to serve as the Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals. I am thankful for the opportunity and privilege to meet individually with many of you following my nomination by the President. Your support of and commitment to the wellbeing of our Nation's veterans and their families is praiseworthy and encouraging.

I am extremely honored to have been nominated by President Trump to be the Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals and, if confirmed, I will work tirelessly to ensure that the Board provides the fair and timely adjudication of appeals that our Nation's veterans and their families deserve. I am equally honored by Secretary Shulkin's support of my nomination and ability to lead the Board. Additionally, I am deeply grateful to have served Veterans as a Veterans Law Judge for the last 14 years, having had countless hours of direct interaction with Veterans, their dependents and caregivers. I am humbled every time I meet with a Veteran and am grateful to have assisted thousands of Veterans and families.

I am joined today by my husband of 31 years, Lieutenant Colonel Brett S. Mason, USAF (ret), my college sweetheart and my rock. We share small town Ohio perspectives and commitment to service as he is the son of Navy Veteran who served in the Korean War. We have 2 wonderful sons. Bryan is a senior Mechanical

Engineering student at Ohio Northern University in Ada, Ohio. Trevor is a high school senior, preparing to attend college next year.

My commitment to those who served this country is deep and personal. My father served in the Navy as a Petty Officer, 2nd class during World War II. My mother is a retired high school government teacher, who through much of the 2000's served as a United States Capitol Guide. As a young woman, like many of her generation, she worked to support the war effort. She installed oxygen lines in B-17s at Wright Field, Ohio while my father served. After losing my father to suicide in 1969, my mother raised me by herself in Portsmouth, Ohio. I also lost my brother, an Army reservist during the Vietnam era, to suicide in 1982. I commend Secretary Shulkin for elevating suicide prevention as one of VA's priorities.

As a result of my father's WWII service and sudden death, I was the recipient of VA benefits. Those benefits were critical and provided support for me through college. My husband currently receives VA service-connected disability compensation and has been repeatedly impacted by the backlog of claims and delays. As a result, I understand the importance and need for timely resolved appeals of benefits.

My experiences as a military spouse enhanced my recognition of the tremendous sacrifice made by the superb men and women who have committed themselves to the defense of this nation. Additionally, my perspective as a VA leader is impacted by my view as a veteran's spouse, a veteran's daughter, and a veteran's daughter-in-law. We must do better.

I view service to this nation, in whatever form, as an obligation and honor to be shared by all Americans. Serving in positions as a USAF civilian in Europe, Federal Labor Relations Authority attorney, and in VA leadership positions from Veterans Law Judge to Deputy Vice Chairman, I developed an excellent background including personnel/HR oversight, accountability, mission focus, labor issues, budget and policy development. I believe my combined work experience and life as a veteran's spouse has positioned me well to continue serving Veterans, to whom we as a nation owe a great debt. If confirmed, I will ensure that in the execution of my responsibilities as Chairman, I will always assess my actions and decisions through the lenses of a Veteran's dependent.

Since 1636, when the Pilgrims of the Plymouth Colony decided to provide care for disabled soldiers, our country has made care for our Veterans a tenet. It is woven into our nation's very foundation and it is the core mission of the VA. To meet this mission, VA must transform and modernize to continuously adjust to the needs of Veterans and their families. The American people expect it and the Veterans deserve it.

If confirmed, I will work daily to support VA transformation and achieving the vision of President Trump and Secretary Shulkin in providing the best service to our nations Veterans and their families. I commit that I will work with the dedicated Board staff of Veterans Law Judges, attorneys, and administrative professionals, to ensure that the Board meets its responsibility to provide correct decisions in a timely manner.

Thank you for your hard work and insight in passing the Veteran Appeals and Modernization Act of 2017. Modernizing the VA as discussed by Secretary Shulkin in recent testimony, working with Congress, VSO's and other stake holders to boldly and aggressively address needs highlighted by each of them, will build upon what President Trump, Secretary Shulkin and the Congress have already started to hopefully regain the Veteran's trust. In implementing the Veteran Appeals and Modernization Act of 2017, I will act to build the Veteran's trust by ensuring that the Board meets its obligations to deliver accurate and timely decisions in all matters before the Board and to continuously find ways to improve and speed the appeals process within the Department.

If confirmed as Chairman, I will bring my experience and commitment to work diligently to promote a culture of service to Veterans. Integrity and accountability will be core principles of the Board. I will expand my existing cooperative relationships with all those involved in the adjudication process—the Veterans Service Organizations, Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration, National Cemetery Administration, State Veterans Organizations, Office of the General Counsel, the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, this Committee and members of Congress—so the Board is focused on effective, efficient, and expedient service to America's Veterans.

This is indeed a great responsibility. I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that if confirmed, I will uphold this trust on behalf of all our men and women in uniform and on behalf of all those who have served. I, again, want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to answering your questions.