

Senator Daniel K. Inouye

Statement of U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye
In support of the Nomination of General Eric Shinseki

Mr. Chairman, Senator Burr, members of this distinguished Committee, I am grateful for this opportunity to stand before you with my dear friend, Senator Bob Dole to present General Shinseki President-Elect Obama's nominee to serve as the Secretary of Department of Veterans Affairs.

In Hawaii, we use a word almost as frequently as "aloha," and that word is "ohana." Ohana means "family," but a Hawaiian family includes men and women not necessarily of blood kinship, but united by shared beliefs and concerns.

I had the great honor of standing with Senator Oren Long to nominate General Shinseki to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Since that appointment and his acceptance, I have followed his career.

In his initial tour of duty in Vietnam he did well, but suffered a grievous injury to his foot. Any other man would have justifiably resigned himself to civilian life and retired from the military. Instead, General Shinseki pleaded to remain in active duty despite the hardship and physical pain.

That is one measure of the man who stands before you today: an unflinching devotion to country and duty.

His plea was granted, and General Shinseki's service encompassed both further study-first at Duke University where he received his Masters, and later at the United States Army Command and General Staff College, and at the National War College. These studies, together with an astute grasp of the pragmatic, and the quality of his leadership, supported a steadily spiraling course upward through the ranks at the Army.

That is another measure of General Shinseki: the stamina required for sustained excellence.

I was so proud when I met with him face-to-face in Kosovo, where he served as the Commanding General. At that time, I was certain that his career would blossom further-and in June of 1999, General Shinseki became the Chief of Staff of the United States Army.

His tenure in that high post included the onset of the Iraq War. As we moved from the emotional frenzy of commencing hostilities, Members of Congress began to have questions-most notably whether we had adequate resources to succeed. When General Shinseki came to testify at Congressional hearings, many expected him to give the standard line the Administration favored. He did not. He told the truth, and in doing so took a position contrary to the Administration.

His honest assessment that more troops would be needed cost him his job, but it is the surest measure of his fitness to serve as a cabinet member.

To speak the truth in the face of enormous pressure to take the easy way out...this is the kind of man I want to see as Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. This is the kind of man I am proud to know-and I am prouder still to be in his Ohana.