

Raymond M. Jefferson, Nominee for Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training, Department of Labor

Statement of Raymond M. Jefferson
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training

Before the
Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs

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Good Morning Chairman Akaka, Senator Burr and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs:

Thank you for your service to the Nation, for your service to the Veterans community and for considering my nomination. I am honored to be here today seeking your endorsement for the privilege of serving as the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training.

Over the past few weeks, I had the opportunity to learn about the Committee's priorities and benefit from your ideas, advice and insights. That has been tremendously helpful. Thank you. Your support and commitment to helping Veterans and Veteran-serving agencies succeed was apparent, heartfelt and inspiring.

I am humbled and honored by President Barack Obama's nomination to serve as the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans' Employment and Training. I am also very grateful for the confidence President Barack Obama and Secretary Hilda Solis have in me to help achieve their promises to Veterans in the area of employment and training.

I am joined today by my mother, Mrs. Nadia Jefferson. My father passed away several years ago, but I know he is here in spirit and proud of what he sees. My mother and father were both lifelong civil servants. My mother, an Egyptian-American, spent her career as a teacher's aide for physically challenged children. My father, an African-American, was the Deputy Director for New York State's Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. I am a product of their upbringing, and of America's public school system. I want to acknowledge and thank my friends for their unfailing support, and express my gratitude to the many teachers whom I have had throughout my life. They have all played a major role in my being here today.

A Defining Moment

Sometimes the split-second decisions we make in life become unexpected defining moments and turning points. I spent 15 years in the Army, beginning as a cadet at West Point followed by 11 years as an Army officer with leadership positions in the Presidential Honor Guard (Infantry), 3rd Ranger Battalion (Airborne Ranger Infantry) and 1st Special Forces Group (Asia). October 18, 1995, is a day that I will always remember and which, unknown at the time, put in motion a series of events that led to the privilege of being here today. As I began to participate in a classified Special Forces training mission that day, I never thought that, within hours, my life would change forever. It was during that afternoon, while trying to protect my teammates from a

defective hand grenade that was detonating prematurely, that I lost all five fingers on my non-dominant hand, in the line of duty. I received tremendous support during my recuperation from my family, friends, the Army and the Department of Veterans Affairs. This support, and many answered prayers, were the reasons that I was able to move forward and recreate a meaningful life. My mother and many of these friends are here today. Thank you – I will always remember what you did for me.

Personal Journey

My personal journey as a Veteran and an amputee has provided me with firsthand understanding and appreciation for the needs that our Veterans have. In the early days after my accident, I was often filled with sadness, worried and uncertain about my future, and fearful that things would never be alright again. Recuperation and the journey forward has been the greatest, most challenging and positive experience of my life. My hardest decision was making the commitment to move forward through life, focus on the positive, and continue striving for excellence. I dedicated the remainder of my life to the following threefold path: (1) serving our nation as a leader in the public arena; (2) helping individuals and organizations to achieve their potential; and (3) performing humanitarian service through global endeavors.

By participating in the Department of Veterans' Affairs' Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, I was able to receive the support and financial assistance needed to achieve a dream – earning an MBA and an MPA (Master in Public Administration) from Harvard University. I can personally attest to the success that is possible when Veterans and transitioning service members have the benefit of a committed federal agency and its staff to assist them.

I continued a career of public service as a White House Fellow, serving as a Special Assistant to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, and then as a Fulbright Fellow in Singapore. Afterwards, I had the privilege of serving as the Deputy Director for Hawaii's Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, a position equivalent to Deputy Secretary of Commerce. Most recently, I was a Leadership Consultant with McKinsey & Company in Asia and helped organizations develop their human talent and performance potential. Since my accident, I've also had the opportunity to work with and learn from many nonprofits that help underserved populations.

Transitioning from military to civilian life as a Veteran-amputee taught me firsthand the challenges that Veterans and transitioning service members can face upon entering the civilian workforce. I understand and have been a part of the communities we serve and those we partner with, and appreciate the importance of transitions and assistance to help create, or recreate, a life and career. I am inspired and committed to help Veterans and transitioning service members create meaningful lives, develop rewarding careers and become productive citizens and leaders in their communities.

Vision for VETS

If confirmed, my mission would be to support and achieve President Barack Obama's and Secretary Hilda Solis' promises to Veterans – restoring our Nation's sacred trust with Veterans and providing them and transitioning service members with better services. Secretary Solis makes it very clear that Veterans and VETS are a high priority for her. She particularly

emphasizes the Department of Labor's (DOL's) responsibility to help returning service members from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars obtain good jobs and create meaningful careers. Secretary Solis also stresses the need for cooperation among all DOL agencies. I would be a principal member of the DOL leadership team and would work collaboratively with the other Assistant Secretaries to ensure that DOL does all it can to help Veterans with their employment needs. Secretary Solis and I will pay special attention to ensuring we serve populations with unique needs, such as Veterans and transitioning service members who are women, ill or injured, or who live in rural communities.

If confirmed, I will consider my responsibilities to be the following:

- (1) Leading the organization in a participative, synergistic manner with an emphasis on inspirational leadership, talent development, peak performance, career satisfaction and performance measurement;
- (2) Developing the vision and creating, communicating and implementing the supporting strategy for helping Veterans and transitioning service members to succeed in today's economy;
- (3) Advising the Secretary on relevant policy matters; and
- (4) Reporting to the Secretary on the results of VETS' efforts.

Should I have the privilege of being confirmed, VETS will be committed to:

- (1) Increasing access to and participation in its programs, and improving the employment outcomes for those participants;
- (2) Helping service members to transition seamlessly into quality civilian employment and careers, with a particular emphasis on "Jobs of the Future" and Green Jobs;
- (3) Boosting USERRA's impact by increasing awareness of and commitment to it, while also reducing USERRA-related issues;
- (4) Investing in VETS' team members to further develop their inherent potential and increase their capacity to better serve Veterans; and
- (5) Communicating and collaborating with other DOL programs and with stakeholders inside and outside the federal government – such as Congress, the VSOs, state workforce agencies, the private sector, nonprofits and other government agencies – to better serve Veterans and achieve their employment needs.

If confirmed, success would be measured by the impact our programs have on helping Veterans and transitioning service members succeed in today's modern economy. I believe performance measurement and best practice benchmarking are important, continuous processes that help organizations provide the best service possible and greatest impact. These processes would further increase Veterans' customer satisfaction and outcomes while helping VETS continually improve service delivery, program results and ensure that public funds are well spent.

In conclusion, if this Committee chooses to confirm me, I will work closely with you, with the outstanding team at VETS and with our partners and stakeholders to provide Veterans and transitioning service members the best possible resources and services to enable their success in today's economy. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to Veterans and for considering my nomination. It would be a privilege and an honor to serve our Nation's Veterans and transitioning service members – I hope you find me worthy.