

Opening Statement of the Honorable Douglas A. Collins
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Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, distinguished members of the committee, I'm honored to sit before you as the nominee to be America's next secretary of Veterans Affairs, and today I hope to earn your support.

I would like to thank President Trump for my nomination and his confidence in me. I am privileged to be joined by my family – my wife, Lisa, and my children, Jordan and Cameron. Not able to make it today are my son, Copelan, and my father.

America is the greatest nation on Earth precisely because of the veterans willing to step forward and defend the freedoms we hold so dear. Throughout my two decades in the military, I've witnessed this firsthand as I've served with some of the finest men and women our nation has to offer.

In addition to being a Navy veteran, I am an Air Force Reserve colonel and chaplain. The chaplaincy has taught me that leadership is about more than rank. It's about listening, having a servant's heart, motivating people and setting a good example for others to follow. If confirmed, that is the approach I will bring to VA.

I'm an Iraq-war veteran. I understand the issues many veterans face because they've impacted me or those with whom I've served.

As a military chaplain, I have years of experience serving others with empathy and kindness.

And as a longtime congressman and attorney, I know the federal government and I have the policy background to solve complex problems, cut through red tape and get things done for those who have worn the uniform.

Over eight years in Congress, I helped champion bipartisan legislation like the First Step Act, the Music Modernization Act and the Defending Trade Secrets Act. I helped scores of veterans solve their VA problems, and I will put that expertise to work making the department more user-friendly, so veterans won't need outside help to navigate the department's bureaucracy.

I have tremendous respect for this committee and its members.

This is one of the most bipartisan committees in Congress. And when it comes to VA, there are many areas where we all agree. For instance:

We agree that delivering timely access to care and benefits for every eligible veteran is job one at VA.

We agree we must instill at VA a lasting culture of caring, customer service and accountability.

And we agree we must do more to improve outreach to our most vulnerable veterans – those at risk of suicide or homelessness.

These are some of President Trump's top priorities for the department, and thanks to the hard work of this committee and a bipartisan majority of Congress, VA already has many of the tools it needs to succeed.

The bipartisan MISSION Act, which President Trump championed and 92 senators voted for, revolutionized VA health care. It's centered on a simple premise: providing veterans the health care they have earned when and how its most convenient for the veteran. I was proud to vote for the MISSION act, and if confirmed, I will continue implementing it to provide Veterans with timely access to the care they have earned. To be clear: I want to make sure that if veterans want to receive their health care at a VA facility, they can do so. But I also want to ensure veterans have the health care choices they were promised in the MISSION Act.

The bipartisan VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, which President Trump championed and passed the Senate without dissent, gave VA the tools to become the most accountable government agency. I was proud to vote for this law, and if confirmed, I will ensure VA uses every tool at its disposal to fire anyone unworthy of serving America's veterans and reward the many outstanding VA employees who do a great job every day.

The bipartisan PACT Act provides vital health care and benefits to veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances. I appreciate the work many of you did on this legislation, and we will make sure we get it right.

The MISSION Act, the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act and the PACT Act are three of the most important veterans laws in recent history. They received widespread bipartisan support because their focus is exactly where VA's focus should be: on veteran convenience and accountability for the department. Under President Trump, these principles will guide the department in tackling some of its toughest problems.

We will not shy away from challenges like homelessness and suicide prevention, electronic health record modernization, and shrinking the department's claims backlog. And we will not stop until we succeed on behalf of the men and women who have worn the uniform.

As a former congressman, I know success requires your help and support as well as that of your congressional colleagues. I want to strengthen VA so it works better for America's heroes, and I will embrace your oversight and seek your counsel as we work together to do just that.

I brought with me today this paracord bracelet and these dog tags, which symbolize for me the countless heroes with whom I've served. These men and women are my motivation for wanting to be the next VA secretary.

This is my vision for improving VA and the lives of America's veterans. President Trump supports the department and I 100% in accomplishing this mission, and today I hope to earn your support as well.

With that, I look forward to your questions.