

Testimony as Prepared for Delivery by Denis McDonough in Washington, D.C.

Chairman Tester, Senator Moran, Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I do so with great respect for your constitutional obligations to advise and consent, to fund and to oversee the Department of Veterans Affairs and the bipartisan tradition of this committee in service to our nation's veterans.

At a moment when our country must come together, the partnership between the Chairman, Senator Moran and members of this committee is inspiring. If given the honor of serving as Secretary of Veterans Affairs, I will strive to emulate that partnership in my work with you—as individual members and this committee as a whole.

We can meet today, in peace and freedom, because generations of servicemembers have stepped forward and sacrificed in our name. And though only a small percentage of Americans have served in our armed forces, the President has called on every American to embrace our responsibility to support our veterans and their families. President and Dr. Biden take this duty seriously and personally — as I know each of you do — perhaps especially since they, like so many of you, are members of a proud military family.

If confirmed, I will dedicate myself—with every fiber of my being—to fulfilling what President Biden rightly refers to as our country's most sacred obligation: To prepare and equip our troops that we send in harm's way and to care for them — and their families — when they return.

It is true that I am not a veteran. But in my years of my public service, I have had a privilege afforded to relatively few Americans: I've seen up close — and been deeply moved by -- the excellence, talents and dedication our men and women in uniform.

When visiting our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen on our bases in Afghanistan and Iraq, I have witnessed the heavy burdens of long deployments away from their families.

Beside their hospital beds when they come home, I've seen their resilience in the face of wounds—visible and invisible—that can last a lifetime. Standing there at Dover when our fallen heroes come home one final time, I've seen the unimaginable grief of military families, to whom we owe a debt that can never be repaid and whom we stand by forever.

Inside and outside of government, I've been inspired how our veterans continue to strengthen our communities and our country out of uniform—as teachers, coaches, first responders and public servants.

Most of all, like every American, I owe a profound debt of gratitude to those who have worn the cloth of our nation. It would be a tremendous honor to serve our veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors by leading the VA — to ensure our nation serves them as well as they have served us.

If confirmed, I will make it my mission to fight relentlessly for our Veterans with a relentless focus on three core responsibilities of the Department:

- Providing our veterans with timely world-class healthcare,
- Ensuring our veterans and their families have timely access to their benefits, and
- Honoring our veterans with their final resting place and lasting tributes to their service.

At the same time, the President has directed me to focus on:

- getting our veterans through this pandemic;
- helping our veterans build civilian lives of opportunity with the education and jobs worthy of their skills and talents;
- ensuring that the VA welcomes all our veterans, including women veterans, veterans of color and LGBTQ veterans;
- working to eliminate veteran homelessness and reducing suicide; and
- keeping faith with our families and caregivers.

In short, if confirmed, I will work tirelessly to rebuild trust and restore VA as the premier agency for ensuring the well-being of America's veterans. After all, there is no more sacred obligation nor noble undertaking than to uphold our promises to our veterans, whether they came home decades ago or days ago.

I am ready for this mission. As a former White House chief of staff, I bring a deep and extensive knowledge of government. I understand how to untangle and solve large, complex challenges—both across and within large agencies. I have seen firsthand that when our government is at its best, it can help serve the American people—including our veterans—and allow them to live in security and dignity.

This won't be easy. The Department of Veterans Affairs faces great challenges—challenges made even more daunting by the coronavirus pandemic. Its capabilities have not always risen to the needs of our veterans. If confirmed, I promise to fight—every single day—to ensure that our veterans have the access to the world-class, compassionate care they have earned.

I look forward to being a true partner with the men and women of the VA—dedicated, highly-skilled professionals, many veterans themselves—veterans serving veterans—who deserve our profound respect and support. I will also build strong partnerships with the veterans service organizations who devote themselves to their fellow veterans, to their communities and to our country.

I've been given a clear mission by President Biden: To be a fierce, staunch, advocate for veterans and their families. If confirmed, I will embrace that assignment with the solemnity it demands.

This is not a mission I take on alone. Every federal agency has a role in supporting our veterans — if confirmed, I will make that happen. Because, again, when it comes to supporting our veterans and their families, every American has a role to play.

Chairman Tester, Senator Moran, distinguished Members of the Committee—thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for the opportunity to join you in caring for our veterans who served and sacrificed so that we can live in freedom today.

May God bless our troops, our veterans and their families — and, as a nation, may we always give them our very best.

I look forward to your questions.