

OPENING REMARKS
MAUREEN PATRICIA CRAGIN
NOMINEE FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY
PUBLIC AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
SENATE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, it has been my honor to have served my country as a member of the U.S. Navy and, currently, as a member of the U.S. Naval Reserve. I have also been privileged to serve Chairman Floyd Spence as his Communications Director on the House Armed Services Committee. I have also served at the Departments of Labor and Energy. However, I can think of no greater honor than the one President Bush bestows by nominating me for your consideration as Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve America's veterans. I would also like to thank Secretary Principi for his confidence in me to fulfill the responsibilities of this office.

As President Bush has said, all that America's veterans ask is that "their government honors its commitments as they honored theirs and that their interests be protected as they protected their country's in foreign lands." The Department of Veterans Affairs was established to do just that—honor and serve America's veterans. I believe this to be a basic obligation of our country. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to serve my fellow veterans.

Secretary Principi has made it clear that he is fully committed to serving veterans and, more importantly, he is committed to making a difference. I believe he can, and he will. The Secretary's commitment and enthusiasm is what drew me back to government service—after only three months in a wonderful and challenging position with Raytheon. This committee knows far better than I that government service is a noble calling—a calling where you have a chance to make a difference every day. I believe there is no greater opportunity to serve than at the Department of Veterans Affairs where Priority One is service in honor of the defenders of our freedom.

Throughout my career as a public affairs practitioner, I have strived to tell the story, completely and accurately, of the agencies I represented. The Department of Veterans Affairs has a great story to tell about the more than 200,000 dedicated employees who honor veterans everyday through their work on cutting-edge research in spinal chord injuries, brain trauma, prosthetic devices, and geriatric care. These employees are committed to excellence in patient safety and providing quality health care. If confirmed, I will work hard to get these and many other good news stories told.

And when the story is not as positive, I will live by the principles taught to me as a Navy public affairs officer: “maximum disclosure, minimum delay.” I truly believe it is the responsibility of government to release information in a timely and accurate manner.

Americas 24 million veterans live in big cities, rural communities and overseas, and their needs are equally as widespread. No matter where they live, it is imperative that veterans have access to complete and accurate information regarding the benefits available to them. If confirmed, this will be my highest priority. I will look for ways to increase and enhance communications efforts, not only to veterans, their families and service organizations, but also internally within the Department, with Congress and with the other federal, state, and local governments.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee, the President and the Secretary for providing me with the opportunity to serve at the Department that is so committed to meeting the needs of our nation's veterans. I will be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have.