

Good morning, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished Committee Members. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today.

I am extremely honored and humbled to be here today as President Biden's nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. I am thankful for the trust placed in me by President Biden, Secretary Austin, and Under Secretary Cisneros.

I was raised in Maricao, a small town in the mountains of Puerto Rico. Not in my wildest dreams would I have thought I would be in front of you today. During medical school, I was blessed to receive the Health Professions Scholarship Program. The financial support allowed me to dedicate myself to my studies and excel. I was driven by an interest in saving lives through medicine and serving the United States.

Upon graduation, I joined the active duty Army at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where I completed my Family Practice Residency. My plan was to fulfill my service obligation and return to Puerto Rico, but after volunteering for the first Multinational Force and Observers deployment to the Sinai, I got hooked. I loved serving with the Army in the field.

My service led me to command soldiers for twelve years at home and abroad, serve with field units for seven years, become the Chief Medical Officer of the United Nation's mission in Haiti, and serve as the senior medical officer during our Hurricane Mitch Response in Central America. My final assignment led me to command the United States Army Medical Research and Development Command and Fort Detrick, Maryland, where we worked on all aspects of medical research.

Working with soldiers willing to risk their health and lives for our country inspired me to continue serving alongside them, and to deliver them the best medical care possible. Those same factors would motivate me to care for our active duty service members, retirees, and their families if I'm lucky enough to be confirmed.

After retiring from the Army, I was fortunate to lead a successful and fulfilling civilian life. I was the administrator of Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital, part of an integrated governmental system that provides critical healthcare service to the residents of Harris County, Texas. Thereafter, I became the first Chief Medical Officer of an over 400-bed acute care hospital in Brandon, Florida. I learned a lot about patient safety, quality of care, and efficient health care management. One of my favorite experiences was being a member of the Army Science Board where I participated in a multitude of studies. Through these experiences, I quickly learned that you don't need to wear a military uniform to serve our County and our communities.

If confirmed, I believe that my previous military and civilian experiences will serve me well as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. I will be honored to have the opportunity to continue to serve our Servicemembers, their families, and our retirees.

I will strive for the highest level of force medical readiness and readiness of the medical force. The future may bring difficult missions abroad and at home. To face these challenges, it is vital

to have a medically ready force. There must be a focus on prevention of injuries; however, if injured we owe our Servicemembers the best medical response we can muster as a nation. We must continue to improve our care, develop solutions for new and old challenges, and work closely with our interagency friends and commercial partners to accomplish our mission. Our Servicemembers deserve no less.

I understand the military health care system is very large and complex, but if confirmed, I will do my best to improve the quality of care, the quality of service, and the value proposition to all those served by the Military Health System. I will work hard to complete the Military Health System Reform in a way that will strengthen the medical readiness of the Armed Forces and the readiness of medical personnel; by improving health care benefits and services to millions of beneficiaries composed of Servicemembers, military retirees, and family members.

If confirmed, I commit to do my best for those serving our Nation. I also commit to work with this Committee and Congress, in a transparent and responsive way, to meet the health care needs of our Servicemembers, their families, and our retirees.

Senators, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today and I look forward to your questions.