

# Strictly Speaking

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RENO, NEVADA  
August 20, 2000**

Fellow Veterans and ladies and gentlemen, Commander ... I noticed earlier you quoted Winston Churchill when you were giving the award to Miss America, Heather Renee French. Here is my favorite story about Winston Churchill. You know the rumor got out that he liked to have a drink every once in a while.

One night he was at this party and seated next to him was Lady Aster. She said, "Winston, if you were my husband I would put arsenic in your drink." He said, "Lady Aster, if you were my wife, I would drink it."

It's a pleasure to be here. You know, this will be my last appearance before the DAV. Everybody thinks I'm a caretaker, but I've got five months and I'm going to do about two years of work in five months to leave things right, like Jesse [Brown] and I wanted it to be when we first started out.

I'll never will forget that day in Little Rock, Arkansas, when the President made the announcement that Jesse would be his Secretary and I his Deputy Secretary. The President was standing there and he was taking these questions, and Jesse I know you remember this, remember the lady reporter said, "How can you justify appointing two veterans' advocates to that position?" Remember that? Jesse and I looked at each other and the President said, "How could I not appoint them to that position?"

I never will forget that and I am very honored to have had the opportunity to serve you, the Disabled Veteran of America, and I want to thank you right off the bat. I won't go through the list of your good works because the Commander did that earlier - your volunteer work, the Winter Sports Clinic, your work in every area that benefits disabled veterans - and I want to thank you for that from the bottom of my heart. I want to thank you for the great work you do to make sure that we have the tools and the resources to provide the care to the veteran out in the field.

And Ed, I want to thank you for the kind remarks about the hospital here in Reno. You know, in 1993, when we first got there, we wanted to improve VA health care. We wanted to fix the benefits claim processing system. We wanted to make our national cem-

eteries more available and maintain them as national shrines and to make sure that the taxpayers' dollars were spent wisely.

Today, I'm here to say a phrase that this year you're not going to hear much. Are you better off today than you were seven and a half years ago? The answer to that is yes and I want to brag a little bit about what we have done.

You know, when we came to Washington under the leadership of Jesse Brown we established ground rules and the ground rules were that no regulations were written without the input from the veterans' service organizations. No benefit or health care decisions were made without the VSO input. Fully staffed advisory boards of veterans and veterans' advocates would be fully involved in the decision making process and no non-veteran would be admitted to any VA facility before every veteran was taken care of. We have not broken any of these ground rules. As a result, together we have done some great things for veterans and we had to have you to make it happen.

We have made great progress in providing health care to our veterans. In 1993, VA treated 2.7 million patients. This year, we will treat 3.6 million. We will have 40 million outpatient visits this year. Eight years ago, seven-and-a-half years ago when we got there, we had 182 outpatient clinics. Today, we have 690 and we're adding one more each week. Veterans have 1,200 locations across this country where they can gain access to health care. More than four-million veterans have enrolled in VA's health care benefits plan since 1998. That's something we are especially proud of. You recall in 1993, in January when we arrived in Washington, D.C., you were an A, B or C. Most of you folks are A. But there were a lot of B and C veterans out there. And the Cs could not get into our facilities. They just weren't treating Cs across this country. Now, thanks to legislation that was passed, every honorably discharged veteran in America is eligible for the health care system, the VA health care system—every veteran.

I was speaking at an event last week and a veteran came up to me, a World War II veteran, and he was almost crying and he started thanking me for putting in a VA clinic down in his little community in a southern state. He said, "You know, I was spending \$700 a month for my heart medication." I now go to the VA and I get it for \$2." That veteran got a \$698 pay raise that lets him now not have to make a decision between putting gas in the car or buying food for his family or enjoying life in his later years. That veteran now can forget about that. He knows he's got his medication taken care of. That's what the VA is supposed to do.

Something else that I'm real pleased with—There was an independent survey done last year that showed that 80 percent of the veterans that use VA hospitals are satisfied, more satisfied with their care today than they were just two years ago.

Long term care is something that we all worry about. You know, we have created an unparalleled system of long term care services and with the Millennium Health Care Act, veterans with service-connected ratings of 70 percent or greater or veterans with a disability requiring nursing home care, will be eligible for it and you're guaranteed to have long

term care and that will relieve the worry of a lot of spouses out there.

One area that Jesse and I both will have to admit we didn't get fixed was claims processing. We didn't fix that. And it's frustrating. But let me tell you, it's going to be fixed. Give them two more years. And here's why I say that. We wasted a lot of time, to be quite frank, and I'll accept responsibility for that. We did not aggressively go after it. We kept letting people say "Well, we're going to get to it, we'll get it fixed." It wasn't fixed. We tried to put a band aid on it. It won't work. It's got more patches on it than a World War II inner tube. And for those of you who remember, you couldn't buy inner tubes during the War, so you had to patch them a lot. But there's a reason for it. More claims are being filed for more issues or conditions. One of my guys told me that a couple of weeks ago, they had a veteran that just got out of the military and filed a claim with 189 issues. Every one of them has to be adjudicated. The complexity of these claims has increased dramatically. Evaluation is much more difficult than just eight years ago and judicial review has expanded procedural requirements. But what we're going to do, we're adding more staff, 1,000 new claims people to work on that, and we also are going to use a lot of information technology. So I am confident with the plan we've got right now that in two years the claims process will be working better and veterans will receive the service they so richly deserve, and won't have to wait two or three years to find out if they're going to get their claim approved or not.

Our national cemetery system had to be fixed, also. Last year, 561,000 veterans died—more than 1,500 a day – and, unfortunately, many of them were our World War II heroes. In the last two years, VA has opened three new national cemeteries. A fourth is scheduled for dedication September 10. New cemeteries are also planned in Georgia, Michigan, Florida, California, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania, and I would like to point out something. This is the greatest cemetery expansion since the Abraham Lincoln Administration. And we're also on a new track to make our cemeteries national shrines, to look more like the cemeteries you see in Europe or the Punch Bowl or at Arlington. We want to do this so we can preserve our nation's history, nurture patriotism and honor the service and sacrifices our veterans have made.

I was glad to see Miss America here today. She and I have done several events regarding homeless veterans and she has been a great advocate. We're going to miss her, but I have a hunch she's like a bad penny, she's not going to go away. She'll be back and she'll stay on this issue because it's dear to her. We worked in earnest to reduce the problem of homeless veterans and I think we've made a start. We are making a dent. I can see it as I go across the country and, you know, when Jesse was there, we put together a program where we didn't hold the homeless money all in VA. We gave it out to local communities, to nonprofits, to veterans' organizations or to state governments, local governments, people that were already doing the job. We gave them more resources to do it. And I think that's one reason we've had a great amount of success. We have made 179 grants totaling more than \$41 million to organizations in 42 states and the District of Columbia. This year, we will spend more than \$150 million in support of our own homeless programs.

Gulf War Veterans—We made great strides in caring for our Gulf War Veterans with undiagnosed illnesses. It's still an ongoing problem. There's a lot of money being spent, \$145 million has been spent thus far on research to try to identify additional illnesses these veterans have.

Agent Orange—something that I'm very, very proud of. In 1993, there were only four illnesses that were service connected for exposure to Agent Orange. Today, we have 12 illnesses and I will always remember the day that we got a report back on prostate cancer. It was 50-50, 49-51, whatever. Jesse was the Secretary then. And I never will forget the look because when they gave the report the person giving the report said "Well, now if we recognize it, we will be seen as coming down on the side as favoring the veteran." Jesse looked at me—and you know that grin he gets like the rat that just got all the cheese or something—He looked at me and I looked at him and I smiled and we both said, "Well, what's wrong with that? We are for the veteran." So we made the decision in those instances for the veteran and went with the veteran whenever we had to.

Our One VA you heard mentioned here earlier by the Commander—You know, people don't see the VA as three different entities—the health system, benefits system and the cemetery system. They see it as VA. I've yet to receive a letter from a veteran saying the VHA sure messed over me or VBA messed me over, but I get letters saying "Hey, the VA messed over me." So I figured we ought to take these stove pipes that these three administrations are and kick them over and make it One VA. Every VA employee now gets an orientation, brand new package. They get an orientation and it tells them what a veteran is and why a veteran is special and they can watch it on their TV. Our benefits specialists don't just get the briefing and sit down at their desks and start doing business. They visit the hospitals. They go to the cemeteries and they understand what the whole VA is. They all carry a card that let's them know where to refer a veteran for expert advice. And here's another good deal.

Before long, all of you veterans will have a [Smart] card, in fact, I'm getting briefed on the prototype next week. You'll be able to go into a hospital and you won't have to fill out a 1010 form every hospital you go into. If you live in California right now and you head for the East Coast, and you have to stop at hospitals along the way, everywhere you go you are going to fill out a 1010M to get into that hospital. With this card, you're just going to take it in, it will be swiped, and it's going to say who you are, whether you're service connected, what percent you're service connected, and you don't have to worry with that paperwork any more. And later on, it will even have your prescriptions on it. I promise you I'll have that locked in concrete before I leave here in January. You're going to have that. It's going to also move the money around with VERA. It will transfer the money from wherever you're treated to wherever your money goes, something that we need to do.

Another thing that I'm real proud of is the way we dealt with customer service. You know, putting veterans first and making the people that work for the VA, who are great

people by the way, understand that they have one mission and their mission is to serve that veteran that stands in front of their desk or comes in for an appointment. That is the person they work for, all of them.

I would like to say in closing that I have enjoyed working with this organization and other veterans' service organizations. Next to commanding a company in Vietnam, it's the best job I've ever had. I've worked with some of the greatest people and made some of the greatest friends I'll ever have and they will remain my friends.

But you must be vigilant as your Commander said here earlier. You must be always vigilant because there are people that don't understand why veterans are special. There are people who don't know their history and don't realize that without the people in this audience and scattered all across this country, all 25 million of you, there would be no freedom. This great prosperity that we have, everybody wants to take credit for it. I give you credit, because we would not have to worry about all these boom times that we're going through if it were not for you.

You're wonderful people and I'm not going to fade from the scene. I'm going to watch and I'll be in a position where hopefully I can speak out a little bit louder. But regardless of which administration comes in, watch them. Don't let them pat you on the head and don't let them sell you a bill of goods. You know, there's an old saying down in the South, "action talks, rhetoric walks." I know, I cleaned it up. Thank you all and God bless all of you.

**VA LEADERSHIP CHANGE  
REMARKS TO THE NEWS MEDIA  
BY PRESIDENT CLINTON,  
SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TOGO WEST,  
AND DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HERSHEL GOBER  
THE WHITE HOUSE SOUTH PORTICO**

July 10, 2000

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon. I want to say a few words in a moment about Togo West and Hershel Gober, and the Department of Veterans Affairs and its mission. But first, I'd like to make one brief announcement.

Since March, I have asked Congress to establish a home heating oil reserve in the Northeast to reduce the chance that future shortages will hurt consumers, as they did last winter. Congress recently, again, has failed to act, and time is running out. Winter may seem far off on this hot day, but if we don't do something now, reserve stocks of heating oil may not be in place before the cold weather comes.

That's why today, I am taking action to establish a home heating oil reserve to help families avoid higher energy costs this winter. First, I'm directing Secretary Richardson to exchange crude oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve for two million barrels of home heating oil to store in the Northeast.

Second, we're taking steps to establish this reserve on a permanent basis. The action I take today will leave us far better prepared to face the winter months. But it does not relieve Congress of the responsibility to act. So I renew my call to Congress: Please, provide the authority so we can tap into this new home heating oil reserve when we need it. Take up my energy budget initiatives and the tax incentives. Pass comprehensive electricity restructuring. Reauthorize the strategic petroleum reserve.

These are things Congress can do right now to build a better, safer, more secure and more affordable energy future. I ask them again to do increase energy conservation and keep our economy strong.

This morning, I accepted the decision of Togo West to step down as Secretary of Veterans Affairs by month's end, after more than two years of effective leadership on behalf of America's our 25 million veterans and their families.

Every day, in every way, Togo West has given his all to make sure America does right by our men and women who have served us in uniform. As Secretary of the Army at the beginning of our administration, Togo West was known as a "soldier's Secretary." His leadership helped make the Army part of the best-trained, best-equipped, most potent fighting force in the world. He took special care to make sure that America took good care of our Army families. And he brought that same sense of purpose to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Under his leadership, the VA has begun to confront some long-neglected problems head on — reaching out to more than 400,000 veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange; pressing for answers to the Gulf War Syndrome and proper care for those who suffer from it; beginning the process of building five new national cemeteries, the most since the Civil War; and making a special effort to bring homeless veterans back into the society they did so much to defend.

His leadership and devotion to our veterans helped improve lives and make this country a better place. And on behalf of all Americans, Togo, I want to thank you for more than a quarter century of service and selfless devotion to our nation.

To carry forward the vital work of the Department of Veterans Affairs, I turn to one who knows the work and the mission of the VA as well or better than anyone ever has, Deputy Secretary Hershel Gober. You all know we've been friends for many years. He did a superb job as the State Director of Veterans Affairs in Arkansas when I served as Governor. He did a superb job as Acting Director between the tenures of Secretary Jesse Brown and Togo West. There are few people in our country who have ever been as prepared for a job as Hershel Gober is for this one.

He has an ear for the needs of our veterans because he has the heart of a soldier. A veteran of both the Army and the Marine Corps, Hershel Gober served two terms in Vietnam, earning the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, and the Soldier's Medal. A few years ago, I was honored that he agreed to head a delegation back to Vietnam to seek the fullest possible accounting of our men and women still missing in uniform.

Hershel has already made his mark on the critical issue of veterans' health care. Early in our administration, he came to me and recommended that we look for ways to bring health care closer to the veterans to need it. Since then, we've opened more than 200 out-patient clinics all across America, and have more planned this year. That's one of the big reasons we were able to treat — listen to this — 400,000 more veterans last year than we did the year before.

Hershel Gober has been a strong partner for both Secretary Brown and Secretary West. He will serve in a great tradition, and I thank him for agreeing to do so. Now I'd like to ask them to say a few words, beginning with Secretary West.

SECRETARY WEST: Thank you, Mr. President, and congratulations to you, Hershel. I think Hershel is a fine choice for the job he's being asked to take on.

I have been privileged to serve in all or part of each of the eight years of this historic administration. My wife — who's not here today — she's in Santa Barbara, looking after an ill sister — and I will cherish the memory of every one of those years.

As President Clinton's Secretary of the Army, it was my privilege to work with America's finest, our men and women in uniform, and the families and civilians that support them. The power generated by the intelligence, competence and dedication of America's soldiers, sailors, Marines, Air Force personnel and Coast Guard personnel will remain in



my memory always. As Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the President enabled me to give life and expression to his and the nation's gratitude for the service of her veterans and the sacrifices of their families.

A nation is defined, as are people, by those who love her. Never has a nation been better loved, never has a nation been better served, never has love through service been more clearly expressed than in the fidelity and patriotism of America's veterans.

In this next chapter of our lives, my wife and I will be eternally grateful that we have had this opportunity to serve. We'll be forever grateful for the leadership of this extraordinarily gifted President. And we'll be forever grateful that we are part of this great nation.

With admiration and unbounded respect, I thank those who have worked with me in the Department of Veterans Affairs and in the Department of Defense — especially Deputy Secretary Gober; I thank those who have supported us in the Congress and in the Veterans service organizations; and I especially thank my President for these eight glorious years.

Thank you all.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, bless you.

DEPUTY SECRETARY GOBER: Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity and for the chance to say a few words.

First, I'd like to thank Secretary West for — his distinguished career and dedication to his country, and wish him the very best in the future.

I want to assure you, Mr. President, and all the veterans of this nation, that each morning when I get out of the bed I will be thinking about what can I do for veterans today. And also, I'm very proud to have actually have worked for you for 15 years.

The Clinton-Gore administration has a remarkable record of achievement on veterans' issues. We have done much of what we set out to do. In fact, Mr. President, you've kept all of your campaign promises. Every veteran in America, honorably discharged, can be in a VA hospital today and receive quality care. We now have over 1,200 locations where veterans can be treated.

And, actually, Mr. President, since we came into office, we've put in over 400 outpatient clinics. I know it's not a good policy to correct you, but I want you to get credit for it.

THE PRESIDENT: You can always do that.

DEPUTY SECRETARY GOBER: We've done remarkable — there is still much to be done. We have to continue to fight for the men and women who serve this country. And every day, if everyone out there would realize when you get up and you see this great economy, you see this great freedom you have, you see everything is going so great in this country, it's because of a veteran, because veterans are willing to put their lives on the line.

You know, when I travel across the country — and I know the President has had this happen to him, too, because you sent me notes about it — veterans come up and they say, thank you for what you're doing for us. And I tell them, you don't owe me any thanks; how can I give you something or do something for you that you have already earned.

And, Mr. President, I pledge that until the day we leave this office that I will continue to represent you and to represent the veterans of America. And I'm delighted to have this opportunity to serve once again. Thank you, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

**REMARKS AS DELIVERED BY  
TOGO D. WEST, JR. SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEGINNING OF  
THE KOREAN WAR CEREMONY  
SEOUL, KOREA  
June 25, 2000**

President and Mrs. Kim (Kim Dae-Jung, President of the Republic of Korea); representatives of the allied nations; veterans of the Korean War; distinguished guests and friends.

It is a privilege for my co-delegation head, the Honorable Charles Rangel, a member of the United States Congress, and for me, to bring and extend the greetings of the President of the United States and the people of that nation to this historic ceremony.

President Clinton is very much aware of the special significance of this anniversary, and he and senior members of the United States Government are leading ceremonies to observe this event in Washington, D.C., and throughout the United States today, along with thousands of Americans and veterans of the Korean war.

President Clinton extends, as well, his thanks and those of all Americans, to the people of the Republic of Korea, for their friendship; for their steadiness to the cause of democracy; and for their continued willingness to remember and honor those who came in uniform to help this republic defend herself, and, in so doing, to defend freedom and peace throughout the world.

One of America's founding fathers, President Thomas Jefferson, once said: "I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past." Today, we gather to remember a past of sacrifice and suffering—and to nurture a dream of a future of harmony and reconciliation: a future that events of recent days have placed within our grasp.

Less than two weeks ago, on June 15, President Kim Dae-Jung concluded an historic summit meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. The two leaders pledged to work together to achieve reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula; to reunite divided families; and to engage in unprecedented cultural and economic exchanges.

The United States warmly welcomes this historic event. Our hope is that the two sides can work with shared dedication to implement this agreement as soon as possible.

How different the future looked fifty years ago today, when the war started. The war that followed was hard and brutal, fought under conditions as difficult as any war ever. No Korean anywhere, north or south, was left untouched by the sacrifices it required.

Sixteen nations sent troops to fight for the Korean republic; another five sent medical aid. It was the first time in history that an international organization had sent an international force to preserve democracy, and to fight for the freedom of another nation.

6.8 million Americans served in the United States military on active duty during the Korean War era; 1.8 million of them served in the theater of operations. Nearly 37,000 died during the war while serving in Korea; more than 92,000 were wounded. The fates of as many as 8,000 more have never been accounted for.

Millions of young Korean men and women fought in defense of their nation. Nearly one million members of the Army of the Republic of Korea were killed or wounded. Our two nations are linked forever by bonds forged in the crucible of war; by a history of shared hardships and sacrifices, and by a future of common purpose.

Those Americans who died during the Korean War did not represent our nation. They were our nation. And in their loss, like those of our coalition counterparts, we contributed a part of ourselves.

All who served in Korea served with courage and honor, and with an overwhelming love of freedom. The Americans who served served in faith, the faith that life—God's precious gift to us all—and the chance to live one's life in freedom are priceless and worth dying for.

Thanks to all who served, and who contributed, there stands here today a free nation, with people proud of their freedom—and who have expressed in countless ways their gratitude to those who came to stand with them in their hour of crisis.

Could any tribute on this fiftieth anniversary year be more heartfelt, or more positively received, than the knowledge that all Koreans, from North and South, may live once again in peace and in harmony, and that their families and friends, long divided by the dictates of politics, may be reunited? All Americans, indeed all of us, pray that this will come to pass.

Five years ago, on another hot summer day, this time in Washington, DC, a monument was dedicated in memory of all those who gave their lives for democracy in Korea. Our President was there, as was the President of the Republic of Korea. Many of those who fought here were also in attendance.

The words of President Clinton to those veterans on that day were telling then, and are appropriate now. He said: "When darkness threatened you kept the torch of liberty alight. You kept the flame burning so that others all across the world could share it."

And it was clear on that warm day, as it is clear here today, that the words inscribed on that memorial are true: 'freedom is not free.'

We remember today all who perished during the Korean War in the defense of freedom, and all who served and sacrificed.

We remember and cherish all who stand today, and who have stood in the past, in defense of democracy throughout the world.

And we remember and support the brave, industrious and strong people of this Republic of Korea, who have risen from the destruction and desolation of the Korean War to become a prosperous and free nation—a full partner with all nations in promoting world peace and global development.

May the new dialogue that has begun between North and South prove successful, and may the momentum for peace that it has generated provide a lasting memorial to the sacrifices of all who fought here, and an inspiration to all who have ever hoped for a better world. Thank you.

**REMARKS BY PRESIDENT CLINTON  
MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE  
ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY  
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA**

May 29, 2000

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Secretary Cohen, thank you for your kind remarks and for your leadership. General Ivany, Superintendent Metzler, Colonel Durham, Secretary West, Secretary Slater, General Shelton and the Joint Chiefs, General McCaffrey, members of Congress and the diplomatic corps, veterans and family members, members of the Armed Services, members of the Armed Services who gave their lives for our country, my fellow Americans.

We are blessed again today, together again in this magnificent amphitheater, in our National Cemetery, to remember our fallen heroes. We honor, as well, all the proud veterans who would have made the same sacrifice if God had but called His heroes home in a different order.

As you entered the grounds this morning you saw every gravestone decorated with an American flag. Indeed, this day of remembrance was first known as Decoration Day, launched in 1868 by the Commander in Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic who designated this day for decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country. Some still mark this holiday in the same way.

On Thursday before Memorial Day, this year and every year for more than 40 years now, the entire regiment of 1,200 soldiers of the 3rd U.S. Infantry has honored America's fallen heroes by placing American flags before every single one of the more than 260,000 gravestones here at Arlington; then remaining on patrol 24 hours a day all weekend long to make sure each flag remains standing.

All across our country in small towns and large cities, veterans groups represented here today perform the same sacred ritual. I want to recognize and thank the members of the Old Guard, and the veterans all across America for their patriotism, devotion, and commitment to honoring the original meaning of Memorial Day. I thank them very, very much.

Arlington's hallowed earth embraces the bodies of servicemen and women from every one of our nation's wars. Every generation has borne a share of the burden of defending the Republic, and giving to each succeeding generation the chance for freedom. Presidents Kennedy and Taft are buried here. Generals Pershing and Bradley are buried here. Admirals Halsey and Rickover are buried here; as are John Foster Dulles and Oliver Wendell Holmes, George Marshall and Audie Murphy.

Three of the Marines we remember forever for raising our flag on Iwo Jima — they

are buried here. And, of course, all the unknown, unsung heroes of more than two centuries of fighting tyranny are buried here. This is sacred soil, and the heart and the history of America.

Our hearts go out today especially to those our departed veterans left behind — the young women who had to cancel a wedding, young mothers who raised their children alone, mothers and fathers who faced perhaps life's greatest heartbreak. To all the families who have placed a Gold Star in their window, I renew our nation's enduring pledge — the United States will always honor and never forsake its fallen heroes. We will not abandon their families. And wherever it takes, as long as it takes, we will keep our commitment to seek the fullest possible accounting.

This morning we were honored to receive at the White House the sons and daughters and spouses of servicemen still missing in action. There is no more compelling way to understand how important our continuous efforts are to the hearts and minds of Americans than to hear it from family members themselves. And that is why I am pleased to announce to you today that the United States and North Korea have agreed to resume the talks the first week of June in Kuala Lumpur in hopes of resuming recovery operations in North Korea this year.

As we prepare to observe the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War, on June 25th, we reaffirm our commitment to the more than 1.7 million Americans who served in Korea, the more than 36,000 who lost their lives there, and the more than 8,100 still missing.

I also want to tell you today about the latest American soldier to come home. Just last week our team of specialists identified finally and official the remains of a soldier of the 1st Calvary Regiment of the Americal division, whose Huey helicopter was flying in the weeds at 25 feet over Laos in the summer of 1970 when it lost power and crashed. The young soldier died immediately. When others rushed to the scene to bring his body out, they were forced back by enemy fire. When they tried again a short time later, they were again forced back. But finally, America returned to recover its own.

Years later, with the help of several governments, extensive interviews, excavations, and DNA testing, a positive identification was made. Army Specialist 4 John E. Crowley, of Williamson, New York, forever 20 years old, was laid to rest here in Arlington Cemetery on Friday in a simple ceremony attended by his mother, brother, cousins, nieces, and nephews. For the life and service of Specialist Crowley, for the sacrifice of his family and every family that has suffered such loss, America is eternally grateful.

We are also grateful for the many groups like Rolling Thunder, who come to Washington to advocate for our POW-MIA families. We hear you. We certainly hear Rolling Thunder when they're here. We welcome you, and we are honored to work with you.

To preserve the peace, we must never forget the sacrifices that have paved the way to peace. Four years ago, Carmella LaSpada, a longtime advocate for families who have

lost a loved one in conflict, asked a group of school children what Memorial Day means. And the children said, that's the day the pool opens. Well, that's not their fault that that was their answer. We adults must do more to teach them.

That's why Carmella worked with Lt. Colonel Jeff Douglass and so many of you here today to launch a new national commitment to put "memorial" back in Memorial Day. So today, for the third straight year, I ask all Americans, in a profoundly symbolic and important act of national unity, to pause, wherever they are at 3:00 p.m. local time, to observe a national moment of remembrance for America's fallen heroes.

At that time, the somber tones of Taps, our national requiem, will be played all across America, and beyond — in the U.S. Capitol, in the Vietnam Memorial, at Ellis Island and the Liberty Bell, in VA hospitals and national parks, on Voice of America and Armed Forces Network, and in hundreds of places we Americans will be gathering today. When little boys and girls turn to their parents and whisper, "Mommy, Daddy, what's happening," a new generation of Americans will have a chance to hear about the defenders of freedom.

As we remember their sacrifice, as Secretary Cohen so eloquently pointed out, we must also resolve to fulfill the obligation the rest of us incurred with their sacrifice — to keep America free and strong. If those who fought and died for us could talk to us on this Memorial Day, they might well ask, America, have you made our sacrifice matter? At the dawn of a new century, Americans can answer that question with solemn pride. Today we are fortunate to be the most powerful and prosperous nation on Earth, with a military respected around the world. We could say, yes, America has made your sacrifice matter.

America is at peace. And the risk of war that would scar the lives of a whole generation has been vastly reduced. Yes, America has made your sacrifice matter. You fought for freedom in foreign lands, knowing it would protect our freedom at home. Today, freedom advances all around the world, and for the first time in all human history, more than half the world's people choose their own leaders. Yes, America has made your sacrifice matter.

You fought to conquer tyranny and bring unity to Europe, where more than 100,000 American heroes are now buried. You gave your lives in places like Flanders Field and Normandy. But today Europe is more united, more free, more peaceful than anytime in history. We have three new allies in NATO and many new partners across Europe's old Cold War divide. Central Europe is free and flourishing. Soldiers from almost every European country, the most bitter former adversaries among them, now serve under a single command, keeping the peace in Bosnia, in Kosovo. Yes, America is making your sacrifice matter.

We have more to do. Later today I will leave for Europe to meet with our partners in the European Union in Portugal, and to make the first visit of an American President to Berlin as the capital of a free and undivided Germany. We will continue our work with our European allies for peace and freedom — to make their sacrifice matter.



I will visit Russia, the former adversary with whom we are trying so hard to build a new partnership and a safer world. Russia has just seen its first transition from one democratically-elected government to another in 1,000 years of history. For the first time an American President will speak to a democratically-elected Russian Parliament. As we support those changes, we will continue to push for greater and deeper ones — to make their sacrifice matter.

I will go to Ukraine, a large country with over 60 million people, struggling to cast off the bitter legacy of communism; located in a strategic place that will determine much of the future of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; to support those who favor freedom and prosperity and stability — to make their sacrifice matter.

The world of today would not be recognized by those who lived at the beginning of the Cold War. Old adversaries have become allies; dictatorships have become democracies; Europe is more peaceful and united; the communism we fought to contain has collapsed, reformed or been discredited around the world.

Heartened by our progress toward peace and prosperity, we will pursue the two remaining challenges in fulfilling the age-old vision of a Europe peaceful, democratic and undivided — bringing Southeastern Europe and the former states of the Soviet Union into the community of democracies.

On this first Memorial Day of the 21st century, the 8th and last Memorial Day I have had the honor to address the people of this country in this place as President, I give thanks to all those who have stood their ground to defend freedom and democracy and human dignity. And especially to those and their families who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Americans never fought for empire, for territory, for dominance — but many, many Americans gave their lives for freedom. As we stand at the dawn of a new century they never saw, but did so much to guarantee for us, far from fading into the past, their sacrifice is paving the way to our future.

Thirty, forty, fifty years after our fallen veterans have gone, we can say, glory hallelujah, your truth is marching on. May God bless you all, and God bless America.

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF  
THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION  
STATEMENT OF**

**THOMAS L. GARTHWAITE, MD  
ACTING UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

June 22, 2000

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today to discuss the progress and challenges in the continuing transformation of the Veterans Health Administration. Five years ago, few observers of VA would have believed that it was possible for our health care system to accomplish such a dramatic transformation. VA has cared for an additional 500,000 veterans per year, opened more than 350 new sites of care, slowed the loss of function of veterans compared to similar patients treated in non-VA settings, instituted a comprehensive quality and performance measurement and management system and used it to demonstrate impressive gains in quality, reduced the cost per patient treated by 24percent, and improved patient satisfaction such that 80percent of veterans surveyed believe that VA is significantly better now than it was two years ago. In addition, we have used our strong foundations in research and education to lead a collaborative federal effort to improve quality of care and patient safety for all.

I am convinced that the Veterans Health Administration is significantly better than it was just five years ago. Yet, much work remains. Fundamentally, we must provide and demonstrate outstanding health care value – the highest quality at a reasonable cost. We have spent considerable effort in measuring our progress to create health care value and we have made demonstrable progress. Additional gains in value are possible as we implement information systems, improve care coordination and communications, and eliminate unintended variability in care.

As an organization whose fundamental product is service, the quality of that service is defined by the knowledge and abilities of our employees. For VHA to continue to improve, our employees must continue to improve. They must do their jobs differently and better tomorrow than they did them today. Therefore, our future will be all about ensuring the success of our employees in treating veterans. We will propose dramatic and creative new initiatives in employee recruitment, retention and development. We will be obsessed with the success of our front line employee. Health care used to be a calling, not a business. We will find new ways to recapture that sense of purpose in all our employees.

While assuring the success of our workforce is the organizational strategy to continued improvement in VA health care, agreement on common goals and strategies is a second necessary condition for that improvement. We have recently put forward six goals that closely match the six domains of healthcare value.

1. **Put quality first until first in quality.** We will create systems that reduce variability and minimize provider variation and error. We will continue to use quality measurement to define goals and chart our progress. We will lead in reporting, analyzing and eliminating medical error.
2. **Provide Easy Access to Medical Knowledge, Expertise and Care.** We will match patient need with expert opinion. We will strive to eliminate barriers to appropriate care which result from such things as poverty, race, gender, geography, language, age, and bias (e.g. mental illness). We will facilitate the transfer of knowledge of veterans' health issues to any veteran who might benefit from that knowledge. We will lead in the use of computerized patient records and telehealth. We will evolve our strategies to provide care to vulnerable populations including the homeless, the mentally ill, the aged, and those infected by hepatitis C virus.
3. **Enhance, Preserve and Restore Function.** We will continue to expand preventive medicine. We will preserve and enhance our programs in rehabilitation including those in spinal cord injury, blind rehabilitation, prosthetics and mental illness.
4. **Exceed Patients' Expectations.** We will assure that veterans share maximally in their decision making process. We will use language that is easy to understand. We will streamline processes and reduce waits and delays. We will set and meet aggressive veteran service standards. We will focus the system on the patient.
5. **Save More Dollars to Serve More Veterans.** We will reduce excess and ineffective infrastructure. We will partner with the Department of Defense and others to minimize redundancy and to leverage our buying power. We will excel at cost effectiveness in health care.
6. **Build Healthy Communities.** We will preserve and enhance our research and educational missions. We will provide leadership in emergency preparedness. We will maintain and expand community partnerships to combat homelessness and to coordinate care for veterans. We will test and share our results in health system design and evaluation, such as our reporting systems for patient safety.

We have chosen goals that would challenge any organization. Our organization has just been through a profound transformation and should justifiably be both proud and exhausted. However, we don't have the luxury of rest. We must adapt as sweeping changes in information technology, biotechnology, health-care financing, and public accountability impact all health-care systems. Within this sea of change, we see solutions to the ills of today's health-care systems. Informatics and accountability promise to improve the quality and safety of care and to shift the power from providers and insurers to consumers. Biotechnology promises to enhance health as well as cure disease. Enhanced information systems may provide the data to rationalize payment systems. In my view, there has never been a time for greater optimism for the Veterans Health Administration.

We look forward to continuing dialogue with this committee, the veterans we serve, our employees, and all our other stakeholders as we take the next steps in the continuing evolution and improvement of our health-care system.

**REMARKS AS DELIVERED BY**  
**EDWARD A. POWELL, JR.**  
**ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**  
**VA CAPITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE**  
**NEW ORLEANS, LA.**  
June 28, 2000

I came to VA in 1998. My only connection with VA had been the GI Bill which I used for graduate school tuition. I hadn't thought a lot about VA until President Clinton asked me to take this job. There are a number of things that have impressed me since I've been here.

First, I started learning about my own family veterans' history. It doesn't sound like a big deal ... I knew my father was a Navy pilot during World War II. I knew my uncle had worked on a secret project during World War II. My other uncles had been in combat in one place or another. What I had not realized is one of my forebears was an officer in the Revolutionary Army.

I also hadn't spent much time around people who had lost limbs. I have good friends who were in Vietnam — combat veterans — wounded, highly decorated soldiers. But, they weren't necessarily inclined to talk much about it. Then one day I had an opportunity to spend some time with Walter Cronkite, and he was talking about how he had gone on the Queen Elizabeth II to Normandy for the 50th anniversary of World War II. It was one of the most remarkable experiences for him, since he had been in World War II as a correspondent. To go back and see, on the ship, clutches of men and their wives — Clutches meaning five, six, maybe 10 people — groups in tears because for the first time the men were telling their wives what had really happened. Their wives had no idea of the horror; had no idea of the endurance, the psychological toll.

Now we have had a glimpse of that in "Saving Private Ryan." How many of you have seen the movie? If that first 20 minutes doesn't knock your socks off ... It's about as close as I can imagine to what combat would be like. That gets me charged up in the morning, and it makes me angry when I see things get in our way of doing our jobs — of caring for veterans.

I'm here today because of two people I happen to think of as superstars. I know lots of superstars in VA. But, these two are Tony Kushner and Michael Simmons. These guys have done things with Enhanced Leasing that are remarkable. And, there are a lot of folks, maybe even some of you, who said, "You can't do that! Why would you want to do that? They won't let us do that. OMB is not going to like us doing that." And, you know what, you are right. They didn't. But we did, because they decided it was important enough to jump in and push the envelope and make it happen.

Let me ask you a couple of questions. I'm 52. How many people are within five years of my age here? Maybe we ought to turn it around the other way. How many people are not within five years of my age? Okay, we'll let you children go to early. No, just kidding! How many people here plan to retire within the next five years? How many

people here are eligible to retire within the next five years? Wow!

How do we deal with this? Do we hire our way out of this problem? It is a fact — so many of you are eligible to retire or are planning to leave. I suggest we are a little late getting started on this. And, that's why my little section of this is called, "The Wrong End of the Telescope."

How many of you remember as a little kid looking through a telescope. You turn it the wrong way away and, my gosh, your friend standing next to you looks like he's three miles away. Turn it right-way around and whoa! Think about being on a ship. VA is a super tanker, fully loaded, charging down a course. The captain is looking out to 20-20, through the wrong end to the telescope. And, 20-20 seems like it's just forever out there. Turn it the right way around, and it's like it's right here. And, guess what you see when you turn it around. You see buoys, or you might see another ship that you wouldn't have seen because it was so small when you looked at it the wrong way. I would suggest to you that some of the "wrong end" issue are capital asset planning, strategic planning, and our personnel issues. We have got to look at fundamentally redesigning how we do our job. If nothing else, the future is going to be dynamic, the word that we all hate, and different than today. Okay, what's the point of a disciplined capital asset management process?

Let's look at the old process. In all fairness, I've only been here two years. I don't have 30-years experience in VA, but it is also my job to come in and be difficult. If I don't get you stirred, then I really haven't done my job. I'm not going to argue that everything I say is right. But, if I make you think, then maybe I've done my job.

We now have more than some 6,000 buildings. I've been told by several of you that we have over 6,000 buildings. But, I've seen printed literature that says we have 4800. I'm confused! I'm a little slow with numbers. How does that happen? We really don't have a clue. Now, if it's a secret, there's no press here so we can talk about it. We're among friends, right? What's our occupancy rate? What's our environmental exposure? Are we leaking anything? Do we have any field tanks out there that we haven't dug up in 35 years that haven't been replaced? Maybe some we don't even know are there? Has somebody been dumping medical waste somewhere that we haven't thought about because that area got plowed over after World War II and nobody's been out there to look at it. I've got friends who have brought property to build a plant on — then your worst nightmare, when that excavator shovel hits a 55-gallon drum. You haven't lived as a private businessperson until that happens.

What opportunities are lost for co-location due to the information deficiencies we currently have? What about alternative uses, other government activities, schools, local government buildings, recreation, and green space? I thought the comments this morning about sharing with the states for veterans' health is a wonderful idea. How about the age of our buildings? Are they cheap to maintain? Talk to some of those guys in facility maintenance who fight those old power plants that are 30 or 40 years old.

Do you know where \$600 bolts come from? That was my business. We made special bolts. Suppose you have a three-inch bolt that hasn't been made in years. The threads

are reversed for some reason. The machinery was bought in 1947, and you need four screws. No one has made them in 30 years. So, let's see, you have to have somebody design it, draw the specs, send it to me, have me order — probably special non-sparking whatever bazaar metals mined in Montana and processed in Alabama — and, that bolt is going to cost you \$700.

How about the risks from fire, environment, down-sizing? We have a building across the street from us in Washington called the Lafayette Building. Does anybody here work in that building? Would anyone here like to work in that building? Aside from the fact that it is in Washington, I'm talking about just a structure. We had a request for \$9 million to renovate that building. And, I asked, "Renovate it? What are you going to do for \$9 million in that *big* building?"

"Oh, we're just going to paint it and we're going to do some stuff." So, I'm saying, "You're just going to be spit and gum repairs. You're not going to fix a damn thing are you?" "Well, we don't have enough money for that." My little pea brain says, "That hardly seems like a worthwhile endeavor. Nine million dollars is a lot of money for nothing." That was one of the things we started talking about. We ought to be doing an enhanced leasing operation with that, so we can use private sector dollars to renovate the building and tear the entire guts out and start over. Are there people out there who don't want us to do that? Why in the world would they be that way? It's Washington! Of course there are lots of people that don't want us to do that. But, we are working on it and we're not going to give up because it's worth fighting for, because it's the right thing to do.

Right now we have a very scattered approach for capital investment. Are we in a political process? Always! Is it based on need? Perhaps! Is it part of our overall strategic focus and strategy? Who knows! Is it well developed with a fair assessment of the risks, the opportunities and the benefits? I'm not sure! Let's think about what a perfect world might include. First, we'd know everything we owned. We'd have a good solid inventory. it would be responsible, logical, constant, *timely*, I emphasize timely because I understand your frustrations. But timeliness does come with familiarity. The more you do something, the easier it becomes. The first time is always a bear. Think about the first day on your job. Were you as good at what you do today as when you started? I hope not. I'd like to think you're a whole heck of a lot better today.

All of those factors should be incorporated in this process. Our strategic plan should drive the alignment of our physical plant and serve our mission — form, function, quality and cost. How many folks paid any attention to the announcement about genetic research this week? It may have been in the papers this morning — the Genome Project? How many of you think that's a bunch of hooey? How many of you think that's pretty amazing? I've had a chance to talk to some of those people, and when you listen to them talk about what the future is looking like for medical care, there aren't talking about buildings, folks. They are saying that the only reason you will go to see a surgeon will be for a traumatic injury where they're putting you back together. Prostate cancer? They're going to give you a shot. Breast cancer? They're going to give you a shot. Diabetes? A shot! And, by the way, if you have a genetically predisposed disease, they'll give you a shot. That's pretty amazing stuff. If we don't have a planning process that can react to that type of

absolute dynamic right turn — a disciplined process — guess what? We're going to be sitting on a ship that's going to run aground over here while the rest of the world is going in another direction.

The CIB process is just the beginning of this effort. It's a start. It's not perfect. I wrote down here it isn't just a pain in the butt, it's an adventure. I may get some disagreement on that one, so I don't know if I want to say that. But it is a first step in a larger matrix of management tools which will allow VA to be a more dynamic, energetic, responsible organization.

So, who makes this happen? Who will set the tone and quality of this effort? If it is not you, who is it? If it is not now when does it get done? And, if it is not now, it may well be too late.

One other point that I'd like to leave you with is the old adage of management that "information is power." You've all heard that. Lord knows I've seen that in VA. People have information and they won't give it to you for anything. They hoard it, hide it, use it to their advantage. I'm here to tell you there is a new paradigm; look at what is going on in the private sector in the dynamic corporations, the ones that get there first and do it best.

Information is power. There is no doubt about that. But, the entire organization, every person in that organization seeks it, demands it, shares it and then uses it. That's your task. That's my charge to you. Use it. Listen to each other. Share this with each other. Demand the information and don't tolerate people telling you can't do it that way. Figure out a way to make it happen. There are ways.

When I was in the Navy, it was amazing. You can do anything in the service you want to if you follow the rules. If I knew the FAR better than the contracting officer I could get just about anything I wanted. My next door neighbor down in Virginia Beach was a military contractor. He was a roofing contractor and he bragged he had figured out how he could get paid seven dollars per nail that he used in putting a roof on a government building — all legal. So if he could do this, and this was no rocket scientist, you guys know the rules. Make them work for you and don't be afraid to step out and kick something and say, "I don't like that. That's not right." And, if you kick it the first time and it kicks you back on your butt, go back and do your homework. He who has the best homework wins, and don't give up.

There is one last comment that I will leave you with and I've said this before. Sometimes people seem a little surprised. In my 30 years in the private sector, big organizations and small, I have rarely come across a group of people as talented and dedicated, that's willing to go the extra mile because of what we talked about in the first 3 or 4 minutes. It makes me very angry to hear members of Congress, to hear the press, to hear the uninitiated take you guys to task as government bureaucrats who only need to get out of the way. I found out differently. I know better. I appeal to your sense of "lets show those suckers what we can really do." This is an incredible opportunity. I was with the chief financial officer from the Coast Guard the other day and he made a comment. I think this is generally accurate. He said, "VA outside of DOD, is the second largest landowner in the U.S."



We have a hell of a stewardship responsibility to that land as well as to the fiduciary commitment that we all feel to those people who put their lives at risk so that we can come to New Orleans as a free people. Thank you very much.

GARY A. ROSELLE, M.D.  
PROGRAM DIRECTOR FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASE EMERGING PATHOGENS  
STATEMENT BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
April 13, 2000

Thank you for the opportunity to provide data regarding hepatitis C in the VHA. In order to reasonably interpret the data that I will present it is necessary to very briefly describe how the data were collected with a comment about the meaning of the test data.

The data were collected from the Emerging Pathogens Initiative, an automated electronic surveillance system that is in place throughout VA nationally. Once a positive hepatitis C virus antibody laboratory test is found by the local computer system, a variety of other data are automatically extracted, particularly demographic data such as age, gender, and era of service. Demographic data for all persons served by the VHA during fiscal years 1998 and 1999 were extracted from the VHA data set located at the Austin Automation Center in Texas. The information provided today will include data on persons who are hepatitis C virus antibody positive at time of testing during fiscal years 1998 and 1999, and data on the total patient population served by the VHA over the same time interval.

The hepatitis C virus antibody test used is designed to screen patient serum for the presence of antibody to hepatitis C virus. A positive test result does not mean that an individual patient has active hepatitis, but, as with all antibody tests, it defines the response of the individual person to infection with the virus. As with all tests, false positive and false negative results can occur. The likelihood that a positive test for hepatitis C virus antibody is truly positive is directly related to the number of people in the population who have the disease. When testing for cause, meaning there is evidence of possible liver disease, in the VHA population served, it is very likely that the majority of the positive hepatitis C virus antibody tests are true positives. However, some patients are tested for a variety of reasons, including at their own request, despite lack of identifiable risk factors. It should also be noted that hepatitis C virus antibody tests can be intermittently positive, particularly in persons who have relatively low levels of antibody.

Now I will provide some data that covers the two-year period. For this 24-month period, there is an opportunity for each reporting site to provide data 24 times since it is transmitted monthly. For FY 98 and FY 99, 92.12 percent of these total possible months were actually in the data set. This is remarkable provision of data for any surveillance system.

For the 24 months, 54,682 unique persons in the VHA had a positive test for hepatitis C virus antibody. I use the words "unique persons" to define actual individuals with a positive antibody test and not just number of individuals having a positive test, since a single person could have been tested more than once.

In graph 1, the age distribution revealed an average age of slightly greater than 49 years old with a rather narrow standard deviation of approximately 9.4 years. This indicates that, for the most part, the age group of persons with hepatitis C virus antibodies were clustered closely around the mean age of 49. As seen in Graph 2, when looking at gender of these persons with a positive hepatitis C virus antibody test and reporting gender, 96.4 percent, were male, and 3.6 percent, were female.

Era of service is illustrated in graph 3. Of the total number of persons who were hepatitis C antibody positive and reported an era of service, 62.7 percent were noted to be from the Vietnam era. The second most frequent group is listed as post-Vietnam at 18.2 percent. The percentage of other eras served drops fairly dramatically after these two with 4.8 percent Korean conflict, 4.3 percent post-Korean conflict, 4.2 percent from WWII, and Persian Gulf era veterans representing 2.7 percent.

For comparison, it is worthwhile to look at the demographic data for all the unique persons served by the VHA during fiscal years 1998 and 1999, since this describes the population from which the persons with hepatitis C virus antibody were a subgroup.

There was a total of 4,186,667 unique persons in this data set. Graph 4 depicts the age distribution and shows the expected two peaks, one at approximately 50 years old and the other at approximately 75 years old. These would account for the groups of Vietnam and WWII era veterans. For comparison, the average age of the persons with hepatitis C virus antibody was slightly greater than 49 years.

With regard to gender in graph 5, for the same two year period there were approximately 89 percent male and about 11 percent female in the total population served. In persons with tests positive for hepatitis C virus antibody, 96 percent were male.

For era served over the two-year period seen in graph 6, 27.7 percent were Vietnam era veterans with 22.9 percent being WWII era veterans. This is consistent with the age distribution that was seen previously in Graph 4. Each of the remaining eras provided small percentages of the total patient population seen.

Lastly, using the Student's t-test for age and chi-square test for gender and era statistical comparisons can be made between the persons who were found to be hepatitis C virus antibody positive and the overall population served by the VHA over the same time period. Persons who were hepatitis C virus antibody positive were statistically more likely to be younger, at age 49.4 compared to age 56.6 in the overall population served. The hepatitis C antibody positive group was also significantly more likely to be male at 96.4 percent compared to 89.1 percent in the population served. The hepatitis C antibody positive group was also significantly more likely to be from the Vietnam era of service, at 62.7 percent, compared to the 27.7 percent found in the overall population served during the two years of the review.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide these data.