

## **New VA Secretary**

We finally have a new Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. On 30 July, Vice President Mike Pence swore in Robert Wilkie as secretary of Veterans Affairs. The VA has been without a Secretary or as sometimes called a Director since David Shulkin was fired in a tweet from President Trump on 28 March. The Senate voted 86 to 9 in favor of his confirmation. With all the fighting in D.C., this is a good omen. The chair of the Senate Committee on Veterans' affairs, Republican Johnny Isaksons said The Department of Veterans Affairs needs a leader who will help move the V.A., away from problems of the past and toward solutions of the future." Senator Jon Tester, Democrat from Montana who serves on the same committee called Wilkie the right choice for Veterans. Tester also said "Our job doesn't stop today. The Senate must always hold Mr. Wilkie accountable to the millions of American veterans he serves." American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan released the following statement "On behalf of the two million members of The American Legion, I congratulate Mr. Robert Wilkie on his Senate confirmation to be the 10th secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. We look forward to working closely with Secretary Wilkie and his staff to ensure America's veterans receive the health care, education and other benefits they have earned through their selfless service to our great nation."

Wilkie served as acting secretary at the Department of Veterans Affairs after former secretary David Shulkin left in March and Trump's previous nominee, his physician Ronny Jackson, withdrew himself from consideration.

"Since day one my administration has been focused on serving the men and women who make freedom possible, our great veterans, these heroes deserve only the best and they will have it under Robert Wilkie - I have no doubt about it," President Donald Trump said during the ceremony.

Before Trump nominated Wilkie for the position at Veterans Affairs he worked for the Department of Defense as undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness under President Bush. This position worked with the health and welfare of all military personnel, a responsibility similar to what the VA Secretary does. Earlier in his political career, Wilkie worked for Senators Jesse Helms, Trent Lott and Thom Tillis. He was the former chair of the North Carolina Republican party.

Wilkie is the son of a decorated artillery officer who served in Vietnam and was wounded three times. Wilkie grew up on Army bases and once joked that he was born in khaki diapers. Wilkie served in both the Navy and Air Force as a reserve officer. Wilkie has an undergraduate degree from Wake Forest University and a law degree from Georgetown University.

Wilkie has a huge task in front of him attempting to improve the services provided by the VA. Our local VA hospital, in my opinion, is providing excellent care to our regional Veterans.