

New Secretary at the VA

As all of you probably already know David Shulkin was replaced as the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Washington, D.C. You also know that I've written about his poor choice in taking his wife on a European vacation and charging us for the trip. As I reflect on the new choice I'm reminded of the told saying 'be careful of what you wish for, you may just get it'. The new person to head the VA is Navy Rear Adm. Ronny Jackson, who, if confirmed, will be the fourth secretary in the past four years. Who is Jackson and what are his qualifications to be VA secretary? According to the US Navy biography, Jackson is a native of Levelland, Texas, and graduated from Texas A&M University in 1991 with a Bachelor of Science in Marine Biology. He then went on to attend medical school at the University of Texas Medical Branch, graduating in 1995 with his Doctor of Medicine. He began his active duty naval service in 1995 at the Portsmouth Naval Medical Center in Virginia, where he completed his internship in transitional medicine.

In 2001, Jackson returned to Portsmouth Naval Medical Center to begin his residency in emergency medicine, finishing at the top of his class and receiving the honor graduate designation. Upon completing his residency in 2004, he was assigned as clinical faculty in the Emergency Medicine Residency Program at the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia. In 2005 he joined the 2nd Marines, Combat Logistics Regiment 25, in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. From there he deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as the emergency medicine physician in charge of resuscitative medicine for a forward deployed Surgical Shock Trauma Platoon in Taqaddum, Iraq.

In 2006, while still in Iraq, Jackson was selected as a White House physician. Since arriving at the White House, he has directed the Executive Health Care for the President's Cabinet and Senior Staff. He has served as White House physician during the past three administrations and was the appointed physician to the president for President Barack Obama. He currently serves as the appointed physician to the president for President Donald J. Trump.

Will Jackson be a good secretary, will he be confirmed by the Senate and will Jackson try to privatize the VA hospital? They are all good questions. It appears that Jackson has very little if any management experience in a large organization, the VA is the second largest after the department of defense. However, some of the past several secretaries have had large management experience, some have had medical experience, most have been Veterans and yet the VA is not operating efficiently. Regarding confirmation, the Senate is controlled by Republicans and confirmation only requires 50 votes, so I'm assuming he will be confirmed. I do expect some demanding questions. Finally, will Jackson pursue privatization of VA? We don't know that answer and hopefully confirmation hearings will give us a clue. Jackson's service in Iraq should make him aware of the special needs of our combat Veterans. There is hope.