

**Health and Human Services Committee
Confirmation Hearing – John Hilgert
January 30, 2015**

**John Hilgert, Director
DHHS Division of Veterans' Homes**

Good afternoon, Senator Campbell and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is John Hilgert (J-o-h-n H-i-l-g-e-r-t) and I began as director of the Division of Veterans' Homes for the Department of Health and Human Services on July 1, 2008. I'm honored that Governor Ricketts has reappointed me to this position.

Let me start by sharing a little information about myself...my education, my military service and my work background. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and earned my law degree from Creighton University School of Law.

My schooling continued but in a different way when I joined the U.S. Army. From 1989 to 1992, I was a Captain in the Army and part of the Judge Advocate General's Corp. The Judge Advocate General's Corps is composed of Army officers who are also lawyers and who provide legal services to the Army at all levels of command. In 1990 and 1991, I served in Operation Desert Storm in the First Infantry Division.

My education and military experience led me to pursue some exciting opportunities in public service. I was appointed to the Nebraska Legislature in 1995 to represent Omaha in District 7. I served two terms as a state senator and resigned my position in 2001 to accept an appointment as Director of the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs. It's a responsibility I continue to hold to this day. I consider serving in both capacities to be an advantage, giving me a broader perspective to serve our nation's heroes.

I also worked for 10 years for Catholic Charities in Omaha as a senior director, specifically as vice president for institutional advancement.

On a personal note, I've lived in Omaha my entire life, except when I was serving in the Army. My wife Cara and I met in Omaha and have been married since 1995. We have two children, Jack and Caroline, and enjoy being involved in their many activities.

The four Veterans' Homes – located in Bellevue, Norfolk, Grand Island and Scottsbluff — focus on wellness and allowing people to live their lives to the fullest extent possible. Our employees strive to serve the unique needs of each member by providing high quality services and holistic long-term care in a community.

We've been able to look at best practices from the four Homes and do what works best system-wide. Our focus on quality has been recognized by the United States Department of Veterans

Affairs through their annual Health Care System Surveys. All four homes have received deficiency-free survey scores the past two years, which is an outstanding achievement and demonstrates the dedication of our employees and the quality care they provide.

Shortly after I became the director of the division, we successfully opened the new Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home in Bellevue. As you know, we're now in the process of building a new facility in Kearney. Our project was approved and the Legislature budgeted state funds in 2013. Preliminary design work is complete and we were notified in December of federal funding in this round. It's an exciting process and I look forward to the eventual opening of the Central Nebraska Veterans' Home.

Nebraska has a proud tradition of taking care of our veterans. Those of us in the DHHS Division of Veterans' Homes recognize that serving those who served our country is important, and an honor, and the right thing to do.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.