

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
RICHARD L. ROUDEBUSH  
AT THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY  
OF  
RICHARD L. ROUDEBUSH  
AS  
ADMINISTRATOR OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

THE ROSE GARDEN

10:51 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Roudy and Karen and my former colleagues in the Congress, and Government officials and friends:

This is a landmark day in that a man who served in the Congress and helped to write some of the laws, a man who fought in the service of his country and who also participated very, very actively in veterans organizations, is going to be the Administrator of the Veterans Administration.

All of you know here, probably better than I, the magnitude of the responsibilities of the Veterans Administration, the magnitude not only in the facilities and the employees and the responsibilities, but the great and important work that the VA does for people.

The number of veterans in this country is almost beyond comprehension when you go back through the war in Vietnam, Korea and World War II. When you take into consideration World War I, the number of veterans that are in our population of 213 million is a very substantial portion.

So, Roudy, you have an obligation to do a first-class job on behalf of a good share of the population of this country, the people who have given dedicated service on behalf of freedom, on behalf of our national security.

All of us here, and your fellow citizens, expect that the Veterans Administration is going to have an outlook that is dedicated to the best in service.

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I said at the VFW speech in Chicago that we were not going to treat veterans as a number in a computer. We were going to treat Veterans as persons, individuals who had made sacrifices, sacrifices for our freedom and our way of life.

So, as you handle the problem of pensions and compensation, the problems of health service with our hospitals and out-patient treatment, as you handle the problems that cover the life of the thousands and thousands of veterans, I am convinced that you will do a first-class job.

The obligation is great, but the person who has been selected and confirmed I know will do the job. So, I congratulate you and the Members of the Congress with whom you served, the members of the various veterans organizations of which you were a part, and the individuals in the service with whom you participated. I congratulate you on behalf of all of them.

Good luck. We are counting on you.

MR. ROUDEBUSH: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

First, I want to say how very deeply grateful I am to you, sir, for your confidence. I am also deeply grateful that you take the time from a schedule that must be backbreaking to have this public ceremony here today in the beautiful Rose Garden of the White House.

I am deeply grateful that my daughter could come out from Indiana, Karen, can be with me today. I am sure the President is aware of the fact that my father is in very bad condition, and my wife had to remain in Indiana and could not be present with us today. So, Karen appeared in her behalf.

I want to acknowledge the presence of my former colleagues in the Congress, in both bodies, and may I say to them I appreciate them coming. My comrades of the veterans organizations, I am very deeply grateful to you.

Mr. President, the charge you have given me is a tremendous one. I am aware of this. The task before the Veterans Administration, administering benefits for more than 29 million of our citizens--and when you take into account the families of those 29 million veterans, a total, an aggregate, you might say, of over 100 million of our citizens, nearly half of our population-- it is a tremendous undertaking.

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But Mr. President, I am happy to report to you today, although I have actually been aboard as the acting Administrator only a very short period of time, I think we have a new feeling at the Veterans Administration.

I think we have a great increase in our morale down there, and we appreciate your support, sir, and the support of our great veterans organization, and I know that we are going to solve all the problems that do lie in front of us.

I am so happy that my colleagues from the VA, meaning Odell Vaughn, could be here today; our Chief Benefits Director, Russell Wilson, who runs our cemetery system, Mr. President, and Dr. Jack Chase, who of course, heads up the greatest hospital system in the world, all 171 of our hospitals, and I am just so happy they could come down today.

So, Mr. President, I believe that is all I have to say at this time, but thank you all for coming, and to you, sir, I offer again my sincere thanks, my appreciation, and I assure you, sir, I will never let you down.

Thank you so much.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all for coming. It is wonderful to have you here on this beautiful day. We are proud of Roudy, and we know he will do a first-class job.

Thank you.

END (AT 10:59 A.M. EDT)