

Statement of Alexander Garza
Before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

on
Nomination to be the Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs and Chief Medical Officer
of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
July 28, 2009

Good Morning Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins, and distinguished members of the Committee. I am humbled and honored to be a nominee of President Obama and to seek your support today for my nomination to be Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank my wife Melissa and my sons Alex, Samuel and Daniel for supporting me here today and throughout my career.

I am grateful for the leadership of this Committee for ensuring the Nation is prepared to respond to all hazards and all threats. The position for which I am nominated was authorized by the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006. Therefore it is because of the work of this Committee in investigating the government's response to Hurricane Katrina, and the important legislation that all of you championed as a result, that I stand before you today. Thank you for your leadership. If confirmed, I welcome the opportunity to serve as the Chief Medical Officer and Assistant Secretary. I can think of few opportunities to serve that are more tailored to my experiences and education as a first responder, physician, and state and local public health official.

I will briefly outline the experiences and qualifications that have prepared me to lead the Office of Health Affairs (OHA) should I be confirmed. The position of Assistant Secretary and CMO is the principal responsible for medical and health matters in the Department. The role comes with a number of responsibilities, including serving as the principal advisor to the Secretary and Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on medical and health matters, leading the Department's biodefense and health preparedness activities, and leading a team that provides health and medical expertise throughout DHS and works in collaboration with Federal, State, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners.

For the past two decades, I have provided clinical and emergency medical care for the most severely ill and injured in a number of capacities. I began my career in emergency medicine as a paramedic for a high volume, high performance emergency medical services (EMS) systems in Kansas City, Missouri. I worked as an emergency medical technician (EMT), paramedic and flight medic, all before graduating from medical school.

My experiences have given me an education in the capacity, limitations and abilities of our first responders at the local level to respond to disasters of every shape and size. I understand well from first-hand experience that "all disasters are local." As an

emergency department physician, I appreciate that the world of emergency medicine is a microcosm of disaster management. After several years in emergency medicine, I have mastered the ability to quickly synthesize vast quantities of disparate data, prioritize problems, develop a cohesive treatment plan, convey that plan to the team and execute time critical decisions if the best possible outcome for the patient is to occur. If confirmed, these skills will undoubtedly serve me well at DHS.

My professional career includes residency training and board certification in Emergency Medicine, and I rounded out my training by obtaining a Masters Degree in Public Health (MPH). I have held academic appointments at a number of institutions of higher learning including the University of Missouri, the University of New Mexico and Georgetown University Schools of Medicine.

I understand OHA's stakeholder community because I have been on the other side. If confirmed, I will use this perspective and my experience to guide and shape the health and medical policies throughout the vast portfolio of DHS activities including plans, exercises, guidance to stakeholders, and input to DHS' grant programs. I am confident that my clinical and public health expertise will prove invaluable as I provide medical and health advice to the Secretary and FEMA Administrator.

In addition to my civilian accomplishments in public health, I have spent the last 10 years as a public health officer and team chief at battalion and command levels with the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. While serving as the public health team chief for the 418th Civil Affairs Battalion, I deployed to Iraq in 2003. I will bring this Federal experience with me to DHS if confirmed.

Furthermore if confirmed, I will apply the same lessons learned from leading a large EMS agency and serving as the medical advisor to a battalion commander on the battlefield: lead from the front, develop a strategy using all available information, convey your intent to your team, and allow them to develop the most effective way to execute your intent. This reflects how I intend to manage the Office of Health Affairs if confirmed. OHA is made up of many talented professionals including physicians, nurses, epidemiologists, veterinarians, microbiologists and many more, who share my passion for public service. As the leader of the office, it will be my role, if confirmed, to clarify the mission, challenge, inform and motivate my team, and ensure that all of OHA's customers, including DHS leadership, components and employees, the congress, state, local and private sector stakeholders, and the public at large, receive the medical and public health support necessary to execute our shared mission of protecting our great nation

My vision for OHA is to provide the DHS Secretary and the FEMA Administrator with sound medical advice founded in the best science available. My priorities for the office if confirmed include: Ensuring adequate medical and health surveillance and assisting in the response to catastrophic events, protecting the health of the DHS workforce, and building resilience within the American people to be prepared for all-hazards. For example, I would like to engage our partners to increase biosurveillance data, ensure the

accuracy of our data sources, and push products to our customers that fully meet their needs. Given the current environment, my initial operational focus if confirmed will be to engage fully in H1N1 preparations, including coordination with DHS' external partners and a particular focus on component services, such as personal protective equipment for those on the front lines. If confirmed, I would ensure that OHA effectively achieves its mission, while working efficiently to best use taxpayer dollars, practicing transparency, and collaborating with stakeholders including those within DHS, in the interagency, and local, state, tribal, and territorial governments.

In closing, I am honored by the President's and Secretary Napolitano's faith in my ability to effectively lead this organization, and would like to put my knowledge and experience to use in continued service to my country. I look forward to working with this Committee if confirmed and I am glad to answer any questions you may have.