

STATEMENT OF  
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NOMINEE FOR  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
UNITED STATES SENATE

MAY 24, 2005

Chairman Grassley, Senator Baucus, distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you today, and I sincerely appreciate your consideration of my nomination as Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs at the Department of Health and Human Services.

One of my first jobs in communications was working next door in the Russell Building as a Deputy Press Secretary to US Senator Robert P. Griffin of Michigan. Please don't ask me to testify under oath about how long ago that was! Through that experience, I learned to appreciate the institution of the U.S. Senate and the important role it plays in our government. If confirmed, I look forward to consulting with this committee and your staff and working together in a bipartisan manner to achieve our mutual goal of advancing the health and well-being of the American people.

My fondest memory of working in the Senate was meeting and marrying a fellow staffer, Jim DeFrancis. Jim was an able and gifted public servant who loved the Senate and its traditions. He enjoyed referring to it as the Upper Body to the chagrin of staffers on the House side. Jim died at the age of 55 from prostate cancer, but I know he would be proud to see me here today and proud of his three sons – two of whom are with me today.

Our oldest son James is an honors graduate of the University of Chicago and heading to Notre Dame to get a masters degree in Theology. His brother Will is a rising junior at Southern Methodist University and interested in taking classes in Arabic to someday help in the fight against terrorism. Our son Mark, who is studying for final exams at

Northwestern University (at least I hope he is), is graduating this June with a degree in theater and a passion for acting and directing.

I have been blessed in recent years to meet and marry Dr. Phillip Wakelyn. Phil himself is no stranger to the U.S. Senate having testified before its committees several times as the Senior Scientist for the National Cotton Council. Phil has made a lot of sacrifices for me to hold the type of demanding jobs that come with public service, and I am grateful for his support.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my parents. My Dad will soon be 90 years old and he made a big effort to be with me today. My Mom suffers from Alzheimer's or she would be with me today. And my brothers and sister-in-laws are wonderful supporters in our close, loving family.

I want to thank President Bush for nominating me to this position. For the past two years, I had the privilege of serving him in the White House as Deputy Assistant to the President for Communications. During that time, I worked on many of the important issues that fall within the purview of HHS, so I was especially pleased when Secretary Leavitt asked me to join his team.

Secretary Leavitt has laid out a vision and a detailed plan for the Department. Under his leadership, we will work to transform our health care system with the goal of making health care more affordable and accessible to more Americans. We will modernize

Medicare and Medicaid, focusing especially on helping seniors and disabled persons learn about and enroll in a new prescription drug benefit. We will advance medical research, while making sure drugs are safe. Together with our state and local partners, we will work to secure our homeland in the event of biological attack or flu pandemic. And finally, we will strive to protect life, family, human dignity and improve the human condition around the world – especially for those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

The challenges are great, but I have great confidence in Secretary Mike Leavitt and all the dedicated public servants at HHS. I am eager to be confirmed soon, so I can be a full partner with them in the work ahead.

I have been fortunate in my career to work in a variety of different jobs and to learn from each of them. I have worked in government at the national level – both the executive and legislative branches. I have worked in politics and political campaigns. I have worked in the private sector at a leading public relations firm with health care credentials. And most importantly, I spent 15 years as a stay-at-home Mom, which taught me a lot of lessons, including what's most important in life.

I look forward to bringing the sum of these experiences to the tasks at hand at HHS. I cannot think of a more rewarding opportunity than to work with you and others to make a difference in the lives of our fellow citizens.

Mr. Chairman, if you and the members of this Committee see fit to give me that opportunity, I pledge to you that, with God's help, I will give it everything I have. Thank you very much.