

STATEMENT OF RICHARD CARMONA, M.D., MPH, FACS
NOMINEE FOR UNITED STATES SURGEON GENERAL

JULY 9, 2002

Chairman Kennedy, Ranking Member Gregg, distinguished members of the committee, guests and staff, I am profoundly humbled and honored to come before you to be considered for this prestigious appointment as the United States Surgeon General. Three and a half months ago, I began an unanticipated and uncharted journey into the unknown when I was nominated by President Bush to be the next United States Surgeon General. I am still numbed and in disbelief at this extraordinary honor. No one could possibly anticipate this unique calling in their life, especially me. For in each successive milestone in my life, I have always felt quite blessed that I had achieved more than anyone in my family and more than I had ever dreamed. From meager beginnings to dropping out of high school and finally finding significant life direction from my first real employer, the United States Army and my then newly adopted family, the United States Army Special Forces. There I was continually tested, challenged and held accountable as I developed essential survival skills that allowed me to survive not only in combat, but also equally important... prepared me for the battlefields of life. Courage, honesty, dedication, integrity and sometimes most important of all, tenacity are some of those essential tools that were transferrable to the "real world" as I embarked on life. I have been privileged to serve the public in many capacities my entire life. From being a lifeguard at a public beach through being a soldier, medic, nurse, police officer, physician and surgeon, professor, researcher, public health officer, public health system CEO and community leader... there is no greater endeavor than to

serve ones fellow man. Now I may have the ultimate opportunity for public service before me...United States Surgeon General... The “Top Doc,” the “Peoples Doctor,”... This really is a surreal experience. As I related to my young very inquisitive daughter, it is as if the fairy godmother reached out and touched me and cast me in the best Disney movie ever made! For many years some had wondered about my apparently disjointed career paths; military and police special operations, emergency preparedness and management, search and rescue, paramedicine, medicine, trauma surgery, public health and teaching. However, to me they were always complimentary in regards to protecting the public’s health, safety and welfare. Then came “9/11” and my 5 decades of careers suddenly all merged and took on a new and even more significant meaning as Homeland Defense and Domestic Preparedness became household words. Ironic as it may seem, I believe it was best summed up by one of our former county supervisors who was quoted in the press as saying, “Rich didn’t know it, but he has been training his whole life for this job,” (U.S. Surgeon General)! Over the last several months after my nomination, I have had the opportunity and privilege to return to Washington frequently as I met many of you and others to prepare for this day. My perception of the awesomeness of our leadership and government has not lessened on any of my subsequent trips, but has rather heightened. Every trip here, I feel like a very fortunate tourist who has been afforded the opportunity to witness the workings of the greatest government and country in the world. As I made my rounds on “the Hill” and had the privilege to meet many of you, I gained a better understanding of the enormous responsibility of the position of the United States Surgeon General. I was absolutely overwhelmed by your hospitality, candor, graciousness and the passion by which you and your colleagues described your areas of interest and concerns relating to the health, safety and welfare

of our citizens. Among our many discussions, a common thread emerged... Prevention, whether the issue was counter terrorism, global health, AIDS, quality of health care, asthma, substance abuse, or childhood obesity... Maintaining health and wellness and preventing disease and injury was the highest priority for all of you, as I am happy to say it is for me.

Of necessity, and by the direction of the President and the Secretary, the role of the United States Surgeon General has broadened significantly from that of the traditional public health responsibilities to now include the expanded leadership role as part of the team “addressing” homeland defense and domestic preparedness. A significant part of this new preparedness endeavor is to build, strengthen and expand the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service. These are our unsung heroes, domestic warriors who on a daily basis during peace and war are responsible for the Nations public health. They can be found working in numerous essential capacities nationally, such as researchers at NIH and CDC, clinicians at the Federal prisons and the U.S. Coast Guard and within the Indian Health Service, just to name a few of their many areas of responsibility. More recently they have been highly visible in our National Office of Emergency Preparedness and in our Disaster Medical Assistance Teams and the National Disaster Medical System.

The events of “9/11” have thrust the new millennium upon us. Never before has the potential role of the United States Surgeon General been so essential to the President, the Congress and the public. As the national leader and spokesperson for health issues as well as the advisor to the President and Secretary, the Surgeon General has the opportunity to bring the best scientific information forward and articulate clearly and concisely complex evidence based science that has the ability to improve the health, safety and welfare of our citizens. From our brave first

responders to mothers and fathers throughout America, we need the ability to deliver timely, uniform, user friendly information that will empower the receiver to take appropriate individual or collective action in daily activities that effect individual and public health, as well as during catastrophic emergencies such as hurricanes, floods, disasters and events such as “9/11.” In our “all hazards” approach, the public is an essential component of our team as are our first responders.

I also recognize that my ultimate success as Surgeon General will be co-dependent on the team I am on and the networks I can establish and work with to effect change. To that end, I also know that I must work diligently in order to establish my credibility with the Congress and other leaders. I will therefore strive to become your consultant, ally and spokesperson as you attempt to navigate the sometimes rough seas of health and public policy development in serving our Nation.

Once again in my life I find myself in the enviable position of having exceeded my dreams. My goal now is simply to serve you and the public in an exemplary fashion so that my legacy would be that my presence made a significant difference for our country.

Thank you very much for the privilege of coming before you to have my nomination considered.