

TO: Appointments Secretary to Governor Gavin Newsom

FROM: Vito Imbasciani PhD MD FACS, Secretary, California Department of Veterans Affairs

DATE: 14 July 2022

MEMORANDUM: Interest in the position of CHAIR, INDEPENDENT CITIZEN'S OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
Of the CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE FOR REGENERATIVE MEDICINE (CIRM)

The positions of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the Independent Citizens Oversight Board (ICOC) of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, will soon be vacated. According to California Health and Safety Code 125290.20, the four Constitutional Officers of the state (GO, LTG, Treasurer and Controller) must nominate candidates to the existing Board who meet the criteria set forth in the Code. I am sending you this memo both to express interest in being nominated for the position of Board Chairperson, and to describe how I meet the 4 mandatory and 4 additional criteria listed in the law.

The outgoing Board Chair is Jonathan Thomas, PhD JD, and the outgoing Vice Chair is former Senator Art Torres, JD.

California voters established the CIRM by passing Prop 71 in 2004 and reaffirmed it by ballot in 2020 (Prop 14). Through its competitive grants program, CIRM supports basic stem cell research at major California Universities and medical schools. The research supported by CIRM's grants program seeks to produce transformational, innovative medical interventions for a host of conditions and diseases ranging from spinal cord injuries and immunocompromised states to Alzheimer's, HIV/AIDS and Zika, to name only a few. The Institute commits to sharing its work equitably with all Californians.

My long career in academics, government, military service, as well as clinical and organized medicine has positioned me to champion the aims of CIRM, advocate for it cogently, and represent it responsibly before the public and their state and federal elected representatives.

The **Criteria** listed in the HSC for the position of Chairperson are the following:

(i) Documented history in successful stem cell research advocacy.

As an elected member of the Board of Directors of both the California Medical Association and the Los Angeles County Medical Association, I advocated and voted for these entities publicly to support investment in basic stem cell research, and for the passage of ballot initiative that created CIRM. This required participating in activities aimed at educating the wider medical community in the long-term benefits of such research.

(ii) Experience with state and federal legislative processes that must include some experience with medical legislative approvals of standards and/or funding.

As the Director of Government Relations for the Southern California Permanente Medical Group, and as President of the Los Angeles County Medical Society, I was

actively involved in efforts on the part of organized medicine to craft or influence legislation that dealt with issues such as scope of practice; medical tort reform; opioid epidemic; patient rights; single payer and other insurance mandates; EMTALA regulations, silent PPOs and balanced billing; and how the state should direct the funding streams created by Prop 56 (2016; Cigarette Tax Increase); Prop 63 (Mental Health Services Act); and other similar statewide ballot initiatives.

In my present Secretarial position, I administer several grant programs in the veteran housing and mental health arenas. Using our elaborate statewide outreach organs, we solicit applications from public institutions and non-profit organizations; evaluate and grade them as to soundness, relevance and potential for efficacy; and award grant monies to the successful applicants.

On the federal level, I have advocated for expansion of veterans' health benefits with the relevant members of both the House and Senate veteran oversight committees. I have been an active advisor to the USDVA, supporting research aimed at treatments of PTSD, TBI and CBE, as well as Agent Orange (Vietnam) and burn pit (Middle East) exposures.

(iii) Qualified for appointment pursuant to paragraph (3), (4), or (5) of subdivision (a).

I earned a MA and PhD at Cornell University, MD at the University of Vermont College of Medicine, and was a Fulbright Fellow to Rome Italy. I have held faculty positions at the University of Florida, Gainesville, and Middlebury College, Vermont.

I have been a practicing urologic surgeon for 30 years, treating a mostly older population suffering from congenital and acquired conditions involving the genitourinary system, but often impacted by comorbidities involving the central or peripheral nervous system, including CVA, dementia, Parkinson's, MS, SCI, spina bifida and meningomyelocele. At the University of Vermont, I worked for one year in the laboratory of neuropathologist Daniel Perl, MD, assisting in his neurologic and EM studies of neurodegenerative diseases, focusing on neurofilibrillary tangles in Ammon's horn and acute spongiform encephalopathies.

I served 27 years as a surgeon in the United States Army Medical Corps, with four wartime deployments that exposed me to battlefield medicine in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and post-acute care (Army Medical Center, Landstuhl, Germany), where most of my patients had limb loss, TBI, PTSD and spinal cord injuries. My surgical training was divided between Yale-New Haven Hospital and the VA Medical Center in East Haven, CT, the latter of which was home to many veterans suffering the sequellae of their battlefield injuries. As a member of the Federal Advisory Committee on Geriatrics and Gerontology, I regularly tour VA hospitals and clinics across the country, with particular focus on the SCI, prosthetics, and rehabilitation and memory care units.

My experience – from combat physician to civilian clinic doctor and operating surgeon – has afforded me the opportunity to care for some of the very patients who stand to

benefit most from the medical advances sought after by the scientists supported by CIRM. It has also given me the passion and intellect to advocate for them. My broad experience in clinical medicine and academics has left me with the appreciation of basic research that allows me to apply the latest advances in medical science to the amelioration of human suffering and the prolongation of useful life. My years of service in the House of Medicine and in the Cabinet has afforded me a keen understanding of the political, cultural and financial worlds in which we all live and work.

(iv) Cannot be concurrently employed by or on leave from any prospective grant or loan recipient institutions in California.

Affirmed.

The “Additional Criteria for Consideration” include the following:

(i) Experience with governmental agencies or institutions.

Governor Edmund Brown selected me in 2015 to be the 16th Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and Governor Newsom reappointed me to the same in 2019. The California Senate confirmed me unanimously to this Cabinet post in 2016, and I maintain personal relationships with a majority of serving members of the Assembly and Senate, as well as with a great number of members of the state’s Congressional Delegation. I am presently an ex officio member of the California Housing Finance Agency and the Governor’s Military Council. I enjoy good working relationships with the other Agency Secretaries and with the heads of many Departments within state government. Along with other Cabinet officers, I serve on the Interagency Council on Aging; the Interagency Council on Homelessness. I headed the now defunct Interagency Council on Veterans during its lifespan, and served on the Governor’s Vaccine Task Force early in the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Boards I have been fortunate to serve on are very varied as to their composition and mission: for-profit; non-profit; member elected; advisory; ex officio; professional; honorary and governmental. Having had the opportunity to formally study board function, I understand the value of board members working in a collegial, collaborative, and consensus-driven environment, regardless of the specific Board model they serve in, and the role of the Chair in modeling such behavior.

Outside of government service, in addition to the abovementioned Boards, I have served on the Boards of the California Hospital Association, the California Association of Physician Groups, and the Southern California Permanente Medical Group. I presently serve on the Foundation Board of the University of Vermont (Audit Committee), a land grant college and home of my medical school alma mater.

(ii) Experience with the process of establishing government standards and procedures.

All programs established by government need a well-honed structure to accomplish their goals. In California, we use the regulatory process to create standards that are as transparent, universal and equitable as possible, with full input from the public being an integral step in their creation.

As Secretary, I have created several new programs within the Department as directed by the Legislature. These include forging the eight independent Veterans (nursing) Homes of California into a unified system; establishing programs for veterans in state prisons; supporting the 58 county veteran service offices; and contracting with the Federal VA to make post-9/11 GI Bill benefits available to approximately 76,000 college-bound California veterans annually. Each of these required the creation, either by legislation or through the regulatory process, of definitions, eligibility criteria, and detailed operating procedures. This process requires coordination between agency counsel, the Governor's legal team, and the State Office of Administrative Law. I have been involved in this work for the last seven years, reviewing (on average) one new proposed set of Regulations every month.

(iii) Legal experience with the legal review of proper governmental authority for the exercise of government agency or government institutional powers.

I work regularly with the Governor's Legal Office on issues that pertain to the Federal programs that I administer (State Approving Agency for Veteran Education; Veterans benefits and appeals; billing Medicare for care delivered in our eight Veterans nursing homes), and with the Chief Legal Councils of sister agencies on an as-needed basis. I meet weekly with my own agency Chief Legal Counsel to ensure that my activities comport precisely with the Military and Veterans Code and other laws and regulations of the state, with regard to setting policy and executing the Governor's priorities.

Finally, as Agency Secretary, I ensure the observance of all workplace protections guaranteed to our 4000-strong, organized, civil service employee workforce. All EEO and HR directives regarding workplace discrimination, harassment, violence, and safety go out over my signature.

(iv) Direct knowledge and experience in bond financing.

I administer several programs that are underpinned by the issuance of general obligation or lease revenue bonds, and sit on various housing-related boards or committees that are active in the bond market. My own Veterans Farm and Home Loan program is now in its 102nd year. It has given home mortgages to 426,000 California families to date, supported by 27 successful ballot initiatives. Using the authority from these successful ballot initiatives, I have issued approximately \$1B in self-liquidating general obligation bonds over the last seven years, working in conjunction with outside bond law firms and with the office of the Treasurer of California

I have issued another \$600M bonds supported by Prop 41 (Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention Initiative) used to build more than 3,000 housing units throughout the state. As board Member of CalHFA, I am familiar with how their (and CalHFA's) bond sales support their mission.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss CIRM's role in the promise of a healthier future for all Californians, and how the Board (and its Chair) can foster and promote that mission.

Thank you for your consideration.

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