

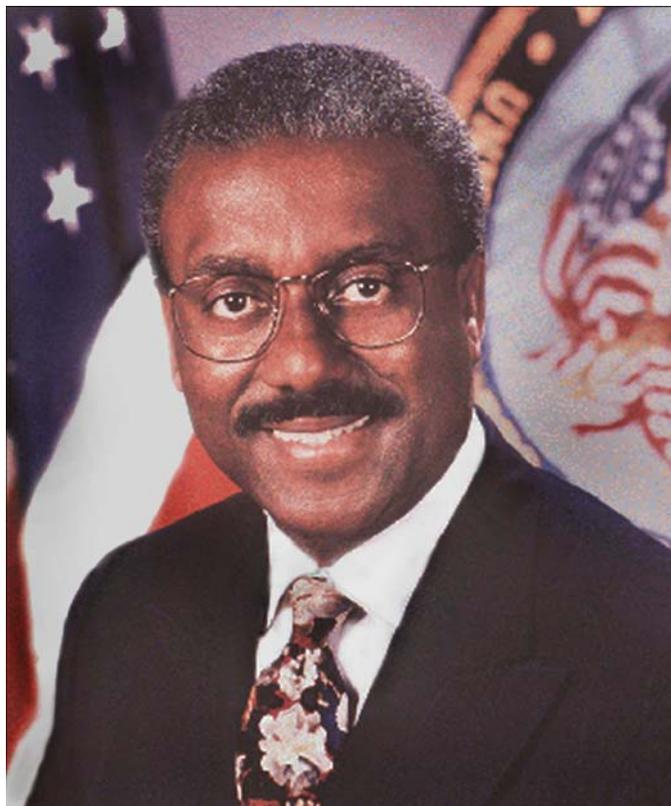
MEMORIAL

“Putting veterans first”—Secretary “for” Veterans Affairs

The Honorable Jesse Brown died at the age of 58 in his Warrenton, Virginia, home on August 15, 2002. This decorated and disabled Vietnam veteran was diagnosed several years ago with lower motor neuron syndrome, which is similar to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig’s disease. Jesse Brown is survived by his wife Sylvia, mother Lucille, sister Dorothy, grown children Carmen and Scott, and granddaughter.

Jesse Brown was my friend in the truest sense of the word. He was also a friend and staunch advocate for all veterans, taking an active interest in their rehabilitation, especially those wounded in combat. For over 30 years, he worked tirelessly on behalf of veterans through his career at the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), which culminated in his tenure as Executive Director from 1989 to 1993 and then as Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from 1993 to 1997. His tenacity made him a driving force in improving the circumstances for generations of veterans and caused the *Wall Street Journal* to feature him on its front page under the banner “You Don’t Mess with Jess’.”

In 1963, Jesse enlisted in the Marine Corps. While stationed in Vietnam in 1965, he suffered severe combat wounds on patrol in Da Nang. His shattered right arm remained partially paralyzed, despite a long and arduous process of rehabilitation in military and VA hospitals. While Jesse was recovering at the Great Lakes Naval Hospital near Chicago, a DAV National Service Officer assisted him in obtaining VA benefits. Soon after, in 1967, Jesse embarked on a career with DAV. As DAV’s Executive Director, Jesse tirelessly lobbied for veteran’s benefits and programs before Congress, the White House, and federal bureaucracy. His unflinching courage in pushing for congressional legislation firmly established his reputation as a distinguished proponent of the health and welfare issues of disabled veterans and their families. His passion for the job was even recognized by Al Gore, who was soon to be the Vice President of the United States and complimented Jesse’s oratorical expertise at a national DAV convention. Soon thereafter, in January 1993, then President Clinton called upon Jesse



Jesse Brown
Former Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs

to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs, directing the second largest Cabinet agency in the federal government. I was very honored when Jesse asked me to be his Chief of Staff and Counsel, and I came out of retirement to serve him and the nation’s veterans.

Jesse took an active interest in rehabilitation of all veterans, especially the combat wounded. His consistent efforts to improve health care delivery and expand benefits for veterans included increasing VA research for veterans suffering from agent orange, radiation, and mustard gas exposure. Jesse also augmented support for sufferers of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He set the precedence for national research that labored to identify the causes of various Persian Gulf war-related ailments. Under Jesse’s leadership, grants were approved for the expansion of homeless veterans programs. Medical services and rehabilitation were offered to improve

the condition of disadvantaged, at-risk, and homeless veterans with psychiatric and physical disorders, in addition to drug abuse. These special programs made veterans' lives more self-sufficient by offering transitional shelter, permanent housing, and employment, in what became the VA's Compensated Work Therapy/Transitional Residence (CWT/TR) Program. Jesse also convened the first national summit meeting on homeless veterans. Initiatives also were implemented for women veterans, to include counseling for sexual trauma experienced while serving on active duty. New women's clinics offered specialized exams, health education, and support groups, providing women with the opportunities to make beneficial changes in their lives.

Jesse decentralized management and health care provisions by expanding satellite outpatient clinics in regions far from large VA hospitals. Better access to treatment made it less costly and time-consuming for low-income veterans, some of whom lived in rural areas without reliable transportation.

Jesse's emphasis on primary care fostered a more positive attitude from veterans toward the VA. His managerial talent instilled a new pride among VA employees as well, and his promotion of "PUTTING VETERANS FIRST" still resonates within the agency.

This is just the "tip of the iceberg" when it comes to Jesse's accomplishments and contributions. On Jesse's retirement from the Department of Veterans Affairs, the DAV noted that he was "the most effective veteran's advocate in recent memory." This compassionate, driven, and intelligent man will be greatly missed by many. The developments directed by his remarkable leadership and advocacy for over 30 years have benefited all Americans, not just veterans. Jesse once said to me that "life is hard by the yard but a cinch by the inch," and he certainly made every inch count in his too-shortened life.

Norman "Gabby" Hartnett