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News Release

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Two VA Employees Finalists in “Service to America” Awards *Deputy Secretary Gould Congratulates VA Employees*

WASHINGTON – Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs W. Scott Gould congratulated two employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on becoming finalists for the 2009 Service to America Medals, the top award to federal workers for their contributions to the nation.

“Thank you, Dr. Janet Kemp and Dr. Audrey Nelson, for your tremendous contributions to the Department and to our country,” Deputy Secretary Gould said. “Your work has saved Veterans’ lives and promoted the well being of our employees. The devotion and leadership you have shown humbles us all, and we look forward to September when the winners are announced.”

Dr. Janet Kemp, national director of VA’s suicide prevention program, is a finalist for the Citizen Services Medal. She established a national suicide prevention hotline for Veterans -- 1-800-273-TALK -- which has resulted in more than 3,000 immediate rescues. “Making the hotline a reality took a leap of faith by many people,” Dr. Kemp said. “We had many barriers to overcome, but we are succeeding because of the strong partners we have across the country.”

Dr. Audrey Nelson, director of the Patient Safety Center in Tampa, Florida, is a finalist for the Career Achievement Medal. Dr. Nelson said many nurses have what she calls the “Florence Nightingale syndrome – they will sacrifice themselves for the patient.” She explored ways to help nurses and medical practitioners avoid back injuries, which resulted in a \$200 million program across the VA to use mechanical lifts and transfer devices when moving patients.

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“You have a 125-pound female nurse trying to move a 250-pound male patient using her own body. It’s a dangerous situation – for the nurse and the patient,” Nelson said.

Sponsored by the Partnership for Public Service, the Service to America Medals (“Sammies”) pay tribute to America’s dedicated federal workforce, highlighting those who have made significant contributions to our country. Awardees are announced each fall at a dinner and awards ceremony in Washington, D.C.

The 2009 finalists come from more than 20 federal agencies, including the departments of Commerce, Defense, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Treasury and Veteran Affairs; the Central Intelligence Agency, Government Accountability Office, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, General Services Administration, Social Security Administration, U.S. Agency for International Development and NASA.

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