

The Honorable Max Cleland
Secretary
American Battle Monuments Commission

Biography

A former United States Senator and youngest-ever Administrator of the U.S. Veterans Administration, Max Cleland has been a distinguished public servant for nearly 50 years.

Born and raised in Lithonia, Georgia, Cleland received the Atlanta Journal Cup as the most outstanding graduate in the class of 1960 at Lithonia High School. He later attended the Washington Semester Program at American University where he was inspired to enter public service. In 1964, he earned his B.A. degree from Stetson University and received a Second Lieutenant's Commission in the U.S. Army through its ROTC program. Cleland holds a Masters Degree in American history from Emory University. Both Stetson and Emory have awarded him honorary doctorate degrees.

In 1967, Cleland volunteered for service in the Vietnam War and was promoted to Army Captain. Seriously wounded in combat in 1968, he was awarded both the Bronze Star for meritorious service and the Silver Star for gallantry in action.

In 1970, Cleland was elected to the Georgia Senate where he was the youngest member of that body and the only Vietnam veteran. He was re-elected to the State Senate in 1972. There he authored and helped to enact into law legislation which for the first time made public facilities in Georgia accessible to the elderly and handicapped.

In 1974, Cleland lost his race for Lieutenant Governor of Georgia. The following year he was appointed to the staff of the U.S. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, where he investigated hospitals in the Veterans Administration health care system and their treatment of wounded U.S. troops returning from Vietnam.

Appointed in 1977 by President Jimmy Carter to head the Veterans Administration, Cleland managed the largest health care system in the country. As the nation's youngest VA Administrator ever and the first Vietnam veteran to head the department, Cleland created the Vet Center counseling program. Today over 300 Vet Centers across America help veterans and their families deal with post-traumatic stress disorders and associated problems.

The Institute for Public Service, in 1977, awarded Cleland the Thomas Jefferson Award, which is given to an American under the age of 35 who makes the greatest contribution to public service. The following year Cleland received the Neal Pike Prize

from Boston University for his outstanding contributions to the rehabilitation of disabled veterans.

In 1982, Cleland won election as Georgia's youngest Secretary of State and served in that office for 12 years. In 1996, he was elected to succeed Sam Nunn in the United States Senate. Cleland held the seat on the Senate Armed Services Committee which was previously occupied by Nunn and Senator Richard Russell.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee, Cleland was a forceful advocate for veterans and for a strong national defense. He successfully fought to improve some of the Department of Defense's most pressing personnel needs, including recruiting and retention, pay and compensation, reform of the military retirement system and health care. Because of Max Cleland's efforts, servicemen and women who choose not to use their GI bill educational benefits can now pass those benefits on to their children. In 2000, Cleland was selected by the Reserve Officers Association to receive the group's Minute Man of the Year Award, which is presented annually to "the citizen who has contributed most to National Security during these times."

After his defeat for re-election in 2002, Cleland was appointed to the 9-11 Commission to study the circumstances surrounding the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and to recommend safeguards against future attacks. While a member of the Commission, Cleland served as an adjunct professor in Political Science on the Washington Semester Program at American University. In late 2003, he was appointed to be a member of the Board of Directors for the Export-Import Bank of the United States, where he served for three and a half years.

On June 3, 2009, President Obama appointed Cleland as Secretary of the American Battle Monuments Commission, managing 24 cemeteries overseas where fallen American troops from World War I and World War II are memorialized.

Cleland is the author of three books: *Strong at the Broken Places*; *Going for the Max: 12 Principles for Living Life to the Fullest*; and *Heart of a Patriot*.