

**** OPENING STATEMENT ****

- Good morning. Welcome to the leadership of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. We're grateful to have you here today.
- And thank you to the leaders and advocates who will be joining us on today's second panel. I look forward to hearing from you.
- This is undoubtedly a critical and unprecedented time for our nation, and for our nation's veterans and their families.
- At the top of our challenges is this pandemic and getting shots into arms of as many veterans as soon as possible.
- As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, my focus is bolstering the vaccine supply chain, and ensuring there is a system in place to efficiently and equitably distribute vaccines to everyone in the veterans' community regardless of where they live.
- But we need your help getting the word out to your fellow veterans - that when it's their turn to get a vaccine, they should get one.
- That is the only way we will get beyond this pandemic, and get our communities and our economy back on track.
- Commander Roesch— thank you for all of the work you have done on behalf of veterans while serving as National Commander.

- I know that VFW allowed VA to use its facility in Libby, Montana, to distribute COVID vaccines, and that is much appreciated by all of us.
- We need to hear from you whether VA is operating in a transparent manner as they execute legislative priorities, including the expansion of the Caregivers Program, the John Scott Hannon Mental Health Improvement Act and the Deborah Sampson Act.
- For the second panel, I want to hear about how VA's numerous programs are effecting the members of your various organizations.
- Veterans and survivors are represented here today. Your testimony will cover a variety of issues vital to ensuring we know what priorities to work on this year.
- Tell me what inequalities minority veterans are facing when it comes to receiving VA services and what VA needs to do to improve survivor benefits, among many other issues.
- And I want to know how toxic exposure impacts your members. Last year we worked hard to expand the presumptive list for Agent Orange-related conditions. Now, I want to hear your ideas for how we can change the presumption process to better serve veterans.
- We are here to listen to you. The voice you and your members provide is an important source of information as we attempt to do right by all veterans.

- Welcome again – and thank you for all that you and your organizations do on behalf of veterans and their families.