

**** OPENING STATEMENT ****

- Good morning. Welcome to the leadership of the Disabled American Veterans. 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.
- 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 all veterans 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 Whitehead – thank you for all of the work you have done on behalf of disabled veterans while serving as National Commander.
- 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.
- There are a wide range of veterans 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 how well transition programs are working, what inequalities minority veterans are facing when it comes to receiving VA services, what VA needs to do to improve its support of state programs, and what we can do to end veteran homelessness, 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 disabled veterans and their families.