

**** OPENING STATEMENT ****

- Good morning.
- Thank you to Commander Oxford and other members of the American Legion for joining us. I commend you and your team's efforts to support veterans, especially during this pandemic.
- And thank you to advocates joining us for today's second panel. I look forward to hearing from each of you.
- We are in a critical and unprecedented time for our nation, and for our nation's veterans.
- 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.
- We need to ensure that every single veteran understands the importance of being vaccinated and has the opportunity to do so.
- But to do this, we need your help. You need to help spread the word that the vaccine is safe, and is the best way to protect your members and their families.
- This is the only way we will get beyond this pandemic, and get our communities and our economy back on track.

- Commander Oxford, I want to hear from you how VA's numerous programs are affecting the members of your organization.
- Tell me how the VA is doing in its efforts to support veterans who struggle with mental health issues or access to health care, and what needs to be done on behalf of women veterans.
- And I want to hear how toxic exposure impacts your members. Last year, we passed legislation to expand the presumptive list for Agent Orange-related conditions. Now, I'd like to hear your ideas on how we can improve the presumption process to better serve veterans.
- Lastly, as you know, ensuring veterans get their earned benefits is a top priority for me.
- Senator Moran and I, along with over 40 of our Senate colleagues, recently re-introduced the Major Richard Star Act, which will ensure combat-injured veterans get their full benefits.
- Senator Boozman and I also re-introduced legislation that would re-instate the 48-hour rule, ensuring VSOs like the Legion are able to fully support their members through the claims process.
- Your organizations are crucial in helping veterans get the benefits they have earned, and it is my goal to support you as best I can.

- We are here to listen to you. The voice you and your members provide is an important source of information as we and the VA attempt to do right by all veterans.
- Welcome again – and thank you for all that your organizations do on behalf of veterans and their families.