

**** OPENING STATEMENT ****

- Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us today to hear views from the Department of Veterans Affairs and veterans service organizations on pending legislation.
- Every year, Congress considers numerous exposure-related bills, each focusing on a specific generation of veterans or one particular disease or condition.
- What has emerged is a broken process and disjointed coverage for veterans.
- While each legislative victory is a step in the right direction, it is clear that our next step must be bold. Veterans deserve nothing less.
- And in my opinion, that step should be comprehensive legislation that is veteran-focused, consistent, and science-based.
- As Chairman, that is my top policy priority this Congress. I know I share that priority with many of the folks here today.
- We must provide health care and benefits to all veterans suffering from the effects of toxic exposure: past, present, and future. It is a cost of war—pure and simple.

- And I'm confident that we can do so because this is not a partisan issue—it is a matter of doing what is right.
- I'm thankful for the bipartisan leadership from members of this committee, and I commit to working with each of you on your priorities as we move forward.
- To our witnesses: I ask that you help us understand the impact of these bills, how they can work together, and what gaps need to be addressed.
- If we work together, we can finally fulfill our promise to our veterans and reassure them that when fight for us, we will fight for them.
- That fight, of course, isn't just limited to toxic exposures. Today we'll learn about a variety of efforts to improve the delivery of health care and benefits for veterans.
- I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and to a productive hearing.