

**** OPENING STATEMENT ****

- I want to thank the Chairman for scheduling today's markup.
- I'd like to focus primarily on a bill that has been a top priority for me this Congress. One that Senator Boozman and I have been jointly working to get through the legislative process.
- Last month, we held a roundtable highlighting women and minority veterans and the barriers they face when applying and receiving benefits from the VA. I think it helped make the case for why we need this legislation.
- Women are the fastest growing population of veterans and VA needs to be fully prepared to meet their needs.
- The Deborah Sampson Act passed the House last fall, and it's now up to us to get this bill across the finish line for women veterans. We have 48 co-sponsors in the Senate across party lines, including 13 members of this Committee, including the Chairman.
- And I greatly appreciate the work of the Veterans Service Organizations, who have brought these important issues to the forefront and been fierce advocates every step of the way.

- The Deborah Sampson Act would create a dedicated Office of Women's Health within VHA. That office would oversee women's health programs, and ensure standards of care are created and outreach to women veterans is performed.
- It requires VA to retrofit existing medical facilities to make it safer and easier for women veterans to get care.
- And, the legislation would improve access to care by making sure women's health providers are available at every VA Medical Center, and that VA providers and community providers are better trained to meet the needs of women veterans.
- It also expands access to child care for veterans accessing care at VA, improves legal services for women veterans, and bolsters the outreach of the Women Veterans Call Center.
- Importantly, it also provides coverage for military sexual trauma counseling to former members of the Guard and Reserve, and aims to make the claims process fairer and safer for veterans who have experienced MST.
- This comprehensive approach – combining supportive services with evidence-based clinical care provided by the Department – will ensure that the VA is meeting the needs of women veterans.

- Passing Deb Sampson would send a very important message – not only to women veterans but to the American public – that we can come together during politically turbulent times to do what’s right. In this case, to provide critical support to those who have sacrificed so much on our behalf, and to offer the services needed to the growing women veteran population.
- Today’s agenda also includes several bills on which I have worked diligently, and that have been months or years in the making.
- My bill with the Chairman – the CARE for Reservists Act - improves critical access to mental health care services for all Guardsmen and Reservists regardless of their deployment status.
- My VA scheduling bill would require VA to take a hard look at its scheduling process in order to ensure veterans aren’t wading through red tape and needless delays to get the care they need.
- Legislation I’ve worked on with Senator Brown requires VA to address its debt collection procedures. It directs VA to help communicate with veterans about possible debts from overpayments and helps protect veterans if the VA is at fault.

- I'd like to thank Senator Brown for his advocacy on this issue and Chairman Moran for working with us to get it on today's agenda.
- Thank you again, Mr. Chairman for putting together this comprehensive agenda. It's been a pleasure working with you and I appreciate your dedication to getting things done.